

LIBRARIANSHIP

QUALIFICATION AND RECRUITMENT AT HOME AND ABROAD

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WHILST IN NORTH AMERICA and Great Britain, after the Unesco Conference at Mexico City, I visited library schools at Universities in Atlanta, New York, Pittsburgh, Seattle, Toronto, London, and at technical colleges in Manchester and Loughborough. I also discussed its examination system with the British Library Association.

Certifying authorities

For North America the American Library Association does not examine or certify: it only lists approved schools which do so; and in addition several States, and Provinces in Canada, certify, and in some cases examine qualifications for librarianship, as may be done by the Library Board in New South Wales under the Library Act.

In Great Britain the Library Association, under a Royal Charter, keeps a register of 'chartered' librarians. It accepts the diploma of the London University Library School, but apparently on precedent rather than on principle, because it is anxious that other schools, set up in technical colleges since the war, shall only coach for its examinations. The object seems to be control over the profession. In North America there is not the same motivation towards an autonomous, exclusive profession as there is in Great Britain and Australia. Here the Institute of Librarians has not sought to establish a monopoly in examining, or certifying, or registering librarians. However, it will not issue its own 'qualifying' certificate on the examinations of the schools so far established, on the grounds that the schools are not yet sufficiently or equally developed, that their year's course may not go far enough, that for a full qualification in a graded profession there should be some examination on the results of working experience as well as on those of theoretical studies.

This means five years' training and experience for a non-graduate and three for a graduate prior to examination for its Qualifying Certificate. The British Association requires three years' prior employment for registration, but not for the examination. Graduates may proceed directly to this, while non-graduates must have passed an elementary examination, for which one year's employment is a prior condition.

Many top men in American libraries were first employed casually as 'pages' whilst working their way through college, became interested,

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and went to library school after graduation. But there is little systematic recruitment in North America through cadetship. The organization of library work there proceeds on an assumption of a top coming from the universities with post-graduate professional training, and a bottom of runners, clerks, etc., though the dividing line in actual duties is not certain and not always the same.

In Australian libraries a good deal of lower grade work has been done in the past by 'cadets', and as it becomes necessary through expansion to recruit non-professional staff the tendency is to give it prospects in an inclusive municipal, civil or university service.

In Great Britain upper and lower deck distinctions have been well established (for example, in the British Museum and the University Libraries) and, until recently, generally accepted. In public libraries it has been found convenient, as in Australia, to have lower grade duties performed by cadet juniors recruited from secondary schools, and later roughly coached for external examinations. Where incidental non-career labour has come to be required in the larger public library systems there has been some wishful thinking of using women, who might have professional qualifications, but who might also be regarded as temporary and transient.

Male and female librarians

Where women have secured permanent professional appointment they receive something much closer to equal pay in Great Britain than they do in Australia but the proportion of women is less, and there is more resistance to feminization than there is in Australia, where the proportion has become higher in recent years, or in America, where the proportion is greater still. There, equal pay has been long established, and the general feeling seems to be, even among women librarians, that over-feminization is a bad thing for all concerned; one hears there little of the nonsense voiced by some women librarians in Australia, that a profession concerned with books and the organization of knowledge is peculiarly one for women.

I would say that feminization can go further in Great Britain with advantage, whilst recognizing the great difficulty of checking it at its optimum point, which may be put at 50 per cent in all grades. It seemed to me that there were more cultured or bookish young men looking to library work in Great Britain than in Australia, where the idea is common with boys and their parents that anything to do with books is somehow 'sissy'. But bookish young men, in the sense in which the term is commonly used and understood, are not always the best material for librarianship, and I think it is true of both countries that, at least for the best salaries it has so far been found possible to secure for entrants more certainly good girls come forward than certainly good boys.

Graduates or non-graduates

More women than men with university degrees and library school training offer themselves. It was the attitude of many British public librarians towards higher academic qualifications as well as towards sex in librarians that I found, not perhaps puzzling in its motivation, but perverse in its rationalization. Even on the assumption of every-

thing else being equal it was only grudgingly admitted that a person with a degree might be better equipped for library work than one without. By many male public librarians, graduates were held to be unfitted by university studies for library work, while librarians without degrees were held to be not only better fitted in other respects, but better educated and more cultured, almost solely because, as one leading executive member of the Association said to me, 'they had rubbed shoulders with books'.

Affectations of literary culture persist among public librarians. The Association has a non-technical paper in its registration examination on English literature, 'the whole field', and another literature paper in its Fellowship examination. These are ballyhooded to the absurd length of assertions that passes in these papers are better proof of humane studies than a degree. Three years English Literature in an Australian university offered in lieu is either refused, or accepted with a great air of concession to the colonies. American degrees are especially disparaged. Yet obviously the A.B. degree of the poorest hick college, which most American library schools would not accept for entrance, has more to it than one or two papers on English Literature. The ancient fable of the fox and the grapes and the modern theory of compensation have some application, but there is also a real problem.

Graduates are plentiful enough in the United States and even in Canada to allow of insistence on a degree together with one year in library school as the minimum qualification for certification as a librarian, with, as it were, unlimited right of practice. They are not so plentiful in Australia or Great Britain. We have a much higher proportion in senior public library positions, and a much higher proportion of juniors reading for degrees, but we cannot yet insist even on every senior or chief librarian, or even on every library school entrant, having a degree. In the New South Wales public service, after a High School Leaving Certificate, a General Knowledge Paper is still the only compulsory non-technical requirement for promotion to senior library positions, and our Institute does not require a degree for its 'Qualifying Certificate'. On the other hand, it does not offer or claim to have any substitute or equivalent for a degree.

Non-technical requirements

Non-technical subjects are not included in its examinations, not that we do not believe that something may be better than nothing, but in the belief that no one subject, such as English Literature, is essential in librarianship, and that employing authorities can lay down their own requirements in non-technical subject fields. After 1950, entrance to our 'Diploma' examination will be limited to candidates with long service in librarianship before that date, or with a degree or an equivalent, such as a technical college diploma. The corresponding British higher and final qualification, the Fellowship, is apparently to remain open to persons without a degree, and is held to imply the cultural equivalent of a degree. I do not consider that it does; there may, however, still be justification in the British situation for keeping it open to non-graduates, and it may be argued that our Australian Institute diploma should remain open to them. But one consideration

must be the effect on the status of librarians and librarianship.

The claim of public librarians to professional status, at least in terms of salary, has been asserted by the British Library Association in the post-war period with some success. But can this claim be proven and this status increased in the future when based on a supposition, not that a man is a librarian because he has, amongst other things, a wide enough culture, but that he has a wide enough culture simply because he is a Fellow of the Library Association? Rightly or wrongly this high sounding title is being increasingly questioned and written down in the United States and in Canada, largely because a degree is not required for it, and we should need strong arguments to change our policy in Australia, where graduates and opportunities for graduation by working librarians do not seem to be as short as they may be in Great Britain.

Technical training essential

All this does not mean an entirely uncritical attitude towards university education. We accept Australian degrees as we find them, whilst being critical of them as evidence of a liberal education and an adequate basis for librarianship. I like better what is being realized in some American universities: a true liberal arts course, without specialization, as a preliminary to professional training. But I do not like the idea of some Americans of making the professional course in librarianship a continuation of this 'core curriculum' course merely with further emphasis on its content, rather than on library techniques, and of a merging of the librarian with the scholar or the teacher.

Many British librarians, with their more limited offering of one paper in English Literature, are also inclined to emphasize general culture in librarianship at the expense, as it seems to me, of its peculiar techniques, those of the organizing, indexing, and indicating of the sources of knowledge.

I take tertiary education to be a general, but not a specific requirement for librarianship any more than it is for teaching, or for the cure of souls. The specific requirements of librarianship, that which makes it an exclusive profession (as pharmacy is for example in the general field of medicine), I take to be the organization and dispensing of knowledge in books. Therefore I would have as many as possible come into or rise in librarianship with tertiary education proven by a university degree, but I would not have classification and cataloguing dismissed as routine for boys or women to do, or bibliography left to the amateur. I would make them the core and major content of the professional course. These 'processes' are, I know, being done more and more in large central libraries, and I approve of this centralization; but it seems to me to require that the librarian should be more and not less informed about them, so that he can be sufficiently critical of what he will no longer do for himself.

If the rising librarian goes on to take a higher degree in some subject field, so much the better. But when I heard talk in America of giving not only an M.A. for studies in librarianship, but even a Ph.D., I said that for my part I would rather Ph.D.s became librarians than have librarians made Ph.D.s.