

TRAINING PLUS

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Based on an Address given to the Palmerston North Branch on April 16th, 1945.

THERE IS NOW AMONG LIBRARIANS, and bodies employing librarians, recognition of the need for training in librarianship. The two courses of training open to New Zealand librarians are the correspondence courses and examinations of the English Library Association and the course of training in librarianship conducted by the New Zealand Library Association.

Under the new English syllabus which comes into operation in January 1946, the old intermediate examination (A.L.A.) becomes the Registration Examination. It will consist of two three-hour papers in each of the following groups:

Group (a)–

- (1) Classification.
- (2) Cataloguing.

Group (b)–

- (3) Bibliography.
- (4) Assistance to readers in the choice of books.

Group (c)–

- (5) Library organization and administration.
- (6) History of English Literature.

The New Zealand Course of Training in Librarianship consists of 21 sets of notes and questions covering administration, aids to readers, the modern book and how it is made, cataloguing, classification. Students who are not graduates must keep a reading record for fifty weeks.

On the surface there appears to be little difference between the two syllabi, but the Training Committee of the New Zealand Library Association has aimed at providing training suited to New Zealand conditions. And there are two important differences which make the New Zealand course the more valuable. The first of these is that the New Zealand course is not an examination, it is a course of training. Students have to work through all the sections, and the kind and amount of work done throughout the

course determines whether the students succeed or fail, the examinations playing the minor role of an audit on the work submitted. The second is that the reading record takes the place of a paper on the history of English Literature. 'Candidates must keep a record for fifty weeks of their general reading and of opportunities which this reveals of linking the library with outside organisations and the interest of readers Books and periodicals on professional subjects, other than those which are read in connection with the course may be included, but the main object of this weekly record is to stimulate and record the student's general reading and to encourage him to relate his outside interests to his professional work.' Libraries are no longer deposits of pure literature, their range of material is as wide as the interests of the world outside, and librarians need to be more aware of this.

Absorbing a course of training and applying rigorously the methods learnt are not the end or even the beginning of librarianship. Dr Bishop, when dedicating the Yale Library, said, 'It is fairly easy to make technicians for libraries. But mere technical skill is not alone required There is a great danger that we shall be content with mere technicians and mere technique in library work.' Before we pass on to the wider implications of librarianship perhaps we should look carefully at our techniques. The New Zealand Course has tried to give students an outline of the accepted techniques in accessioning, lending methods, cataloguing, etc., and at the same time to encourage students to examine their techniques critically, rejecting those which have no value for their particular field of work and improving new methods to suit developing needs.

Librarians the world over are beginning to debunk the sacred mumbo-jumbo that so often passed for efficient library method and are attempting to relate their methods more closely to present-day needs. The current professional literature devotes a good deal of space to cataloguing procedure and makes most stimulating reading.

In his 'Annual Report of the Librarian of Congress for the Fiscal Year ended June 30, 1943,' Archibald MacLeish says: 'American libraries as a whole are either doing far too much or far too little in their efforts to catalogue the vast modern flow of printed and near-printed materials. Libraries should either have the courage of their convictions and demand in season and out that they be provided with the armies of cataloguers who would be required to apply the existing procedures to the swelling flood of print, or

they should admit that the procedures are outmoded and devote all their efforts to the search for a solution adapted to the realities of the work to be done and the time and manpower available to do it . . . It is at least possible that if the profession would candidly face the fact that present cataloguing methods are nineteenth century methods devised for forms of print which no longer constitute the bulk of library accessions, and for categories of readers who constitute a part only of present and potential library clientele, a solution satisfactory to the profession could be found.'

The 1944 July and October numbers of 'The Library Quarterly' have articles on subject catalogues. In one of them, 'The subject catalogue in the college library; an investigation of terminology, by Patricia B. Knapp, the results of experimentation and observation on the use made of the catalogue by students suggest that the rules of subject cataloguing should be revised. To take one example only, it was found that 'the choice between subject and place in determining a subject heading should rest primarily on the geographical rather than on the subject character of the material. Local and national material should, in general, be entered under the subject. Foreign and non-local material should, in general, be entered under the place.' They found that the student who wanted material on Russian schools looked under 'Russia' and its subdivisions instead of under the entry used, 'Education—Russia.' The student who wanted a book on American foreign relations looked under 'Foreign Relations' instead of under 'United States—Foreign Relations.'

That is a sample of the kind of enquiry librarians abroad are pursuing to-day. The conclusions may not be valid for New Zealand, but we should at least know about them and do some experimenting ourselves. What do we know of the results of our work, how much of it is valuable and how much wasted? How true is it that 'the hieroglyphics on the base of the spine of the book are the private mystery of the librarian'?

But problems of technique are not the only problems confronting us to-day. Training is necessary, yes, but what is it for? To enable us to so collect, organize and administer printed materials that all who come may find what they want in them? No mere technician can do that, to be successful the librarian must be a person of wide general knowledge, alert to what is going on outside the library walls, and so interested and sympathetic to the readers' point of view that he can readily understand and

even anticipate the readers' needs. A good educational background is essential to the librarian, without it he will find it almost impossible to gain enough knowledge to enable him to find his way amongst the labyrinth of materials he has to administer.

We say 'that all who come may find,' but who does come? How large a proportion of the population use the library, what impact has it made on the world at large? In 1933 librarians in America were so distressed to find that the committee of social scientists who issued a two-volume report on 'Recent social trends in the United States' had not found libraries important enough to mention. In his 'American librarianship from a European angle,' Wilhelm Munthe says, 'The ordinary man takes the public library for granted, just as he does the public school, and gives it no further thought. There is nothing very sensational about the ordinary work of the library. The articles that appear in the paper usually come directly from the library itself and are classed as local fillers. Only once in a great while does it rate a feature story. But the most surprising thing is that the library is so seldom mentioned in the literary and cultural journals, and that the sociological literature to so great an extent ignores it. Whenever a famous man is asked to speak at a library jubilee or convention he merely repeats the pleasant eulogistic words that people expect to hear A little way along in his speech he may express regret that he has not personally had the opportunity to make use of the library's excellent service. And this is perhaps the first and last time this famous person opens his mouth on behalf of libraries.'

• Can we in New Zealand claim that we are better than that? We cannot even say that we are taken for granted, and we are certainly not on a par with the public school.

The public school does serve the whole community, we are supported from public funds, should we not serve the whole community too? Perhaps it is time we defined our aims and decided just what kind of service the trained librarian should give, and to whom.

In 'The public library comes of age,' James Howard Wellard tells us that in the 1850's reformers regarded the public library as the democratic and humanitarian remedy for ignorance, degeneracy, inebriety and all those social sores which offended the moral consciousness of liberal-minded people. Beer or Books? was the controversy of the early public library movement. He tells us that it so happened that these functions and objectives were impracticable and

misconceived, but that they were not vague and confused as are the objectives of libraries to-day. 'What is the public library for? It is very difficult for the honest librarian to tell us. On the one hand, he will certainly not want to agree with those severe critics who maintain that it is a depository of a few expensive reference books and a lot of cheap fiction, all made available to an unidentified group of the population at the expense of the whole community. On the other hand, he will not want to be jockeyed into the awkward position of having to admit that the function of his institution is to supply only the best books to those who deserve them Here, then, is the crux of the matter. The public library no longer has any recognisable and specific objectives; and librarians as sensible and responsible public servants can do no other than compromise with the extremes—extremes represented by the scholarly library on the one side and the circulating library on the other. In one library we find a leaning towards the one; in another a leaning towards the other. With the unfortunate emphasis on circulation figures, the librarian is often driven to yielding to the demand for ephemeral and worthless literature. Then, again, conscious of more worthy objectives, he builds up his special collection, buys expensive and abstruse reference books, and arranges educational programmes like public lectures. In all of this we can discern the confusion innate in an institution without a clearly defined policy. This is not to say that the public library does not ultimately benefit society. It is only to say that the full opportunities and potentialities of this institution have never been explored and defined.

Wellard asks, 'Has the profession ever been able to sacrifice its pride for the sake of its honesty?' He stresses the value of such studies as Gray and Monroe, 'The reading interests and habits of adults,' and suggests that large-scale community surveys are necessary. And again and again he refers to the need for well-trained and socially conscious librarians. He considers 'it not unlikely that many library techniques give more satisfaction to librarians than to readers,' and his librarian is a person who can recognise this and overcome it.

The salutary scorn of Wellard, 'The subsequent history of public libraries was a history of numerous white elephants which grew increasingly grey with the years,' may provoke us into investigating our own aims and achievements. Many other writers share his views. Lyman Bryson in an essay on 'Educating the community through the

Library,' says, 'Perhaps the most important thing for us to say about the librarian as the educator of the community is the most obvious. He must serve the whole community with books. Some librarians do not. They accept the principle but do not practice it; that is, they serve the people who come to the library but do not exert much effort for those who are somehow out of the sphere of its influence. Sometimes when I look at the vast piles of stone that are called public libraries—beautiful marble cemeteries—I pray for a charge of dynamite that would blow them in a great scatteration over the whole community. So many of the books would do more good where they happened to fall than they do now, gathering dust on the shelves.'

There are so many things we do not know about our readers and non-readers that investigation of almost any kind would be fruitful. In 1936 the New York Public Library carried out an exploratory survey of readers. The results are published as 'Who uses the Public Library; a survey of the patrons of the circulation and reference departments of the New York Public Library,' by William Converse Haygood. They tried to find out such things as 'What library patrons read and where they get it,' 'What patrons think of the Public Library,' 'Who comes to the Public Library,' 'The use of the Catalogue.' Their results are interesting. To quote a few: Skilled tradesmen and unskilled labourers were everywhere under-represented among library patrons in proportion to their numbers in the general population; not a catalogue itself, but how to locate books after they had been found in the catalogue presented the greatest problem to readers. Half of the readers using the branches during one week found what they wanted. A third partially fulfilled their needs, and the rest failed entirely.

When we have acquired a training in technique we should devote part of our time to surveys of this sort and from the information we gain work out ways of attracting all the community to the library and satisfying them fully when they come.