The Function of the Public Library in respect of Political Science; with some particulars of the British Library of Political Science.¹

THERE are many indications that, just as the nineteenth century has been, in the main, the century of Physical Science, the twentieth will be the century of Political Science. The past hundred years have witnessed a marvellous growth of our knowledge of the world apart from man. New sciences such as Chemistry, Physics and Biology have virtually been created. It seems not improbable that the next century will see an ever-increasing attention paid to another part of the universe, namely, mankind itself, in all its manifold social groupings. I regard as the special work of the twentieth century the creation of the new Science of Sociology, or, as we are now beginning to call it, Political Science.

Now, assuming for the moment that there is any truth in this forecast of the main intellectual work of the coming century, I venture to bring before this assembly some suggestions as to the important function which, in this connection, will have to be performed by our public libraries. The development of Physical Science has been made possible only by the collection of materials and specimens. Mineralogy and Geology, Botany and Zoology—to name only some of the most familiar instances—could never have progressed out of the stage of mere literary imaginations to that of accredited bodies of organised knowledge of facts, without the slow and laborious collection of the innumerable types and varieties which were gradually discovered to exist, and which were subsequently found by patient comparison and investigation to be capable of Scientific Classification. In this work of collection and preservation of materials for Physical and Biological Science, the chief part has been played by the public museums. Without their assistance, biologist and geologist could have made only the slowest progress. The suggestion that I desire to bring before you is that the time has come for rendering a similar service to

¹ Read at the Twentieth Annual Meeting of the Library Association, London, October, 1897.

Political Science, and that it is to our Public Libraries that we must look to render this service.

The materials with which Political Science has to deal comprise everything relating to social organisation. Just as the geologist examines fossils and rock-specimens, so the student of Political Science investigates town councils and trade unions, schools and factories, churches and prisons. Just as it is the work of the biologist to compare the structure and watch the functioning of every species of living organism, so it is the task of the Political Economist to compare the even greater varieties of structure and investigate the still more complicated functionings of every kind of social machinery which man, consciously or unconsciously, creates for himself. In this work the Political Economist is under the drawback, as compared with the geologist, that he cannot break off a convenient specimen to take home with him; and as compared with the biologist, that he cannot actually put a section under the microscope. On the other hand, he has the advantage over them in the fact that most social organisations reveal themselves in deliberate records of their structure and function. It is these records and contemporary descriptions of social organisations that have to be studied by the student of Political Science. The foundation of all sound science is a large observation of facts. There will probably have to be made great accumulations of these records and descriptions of every kind of social organisation before Political Science can advance to the stage which mineralogy or geology, botany or zoology, have already reached. I do not see how these collections are to be made except by the Public Libraries. Our Libraries, in short, among their other functions, must become the museums of the sociologist.

The task of collecting and preserving all the records of all the different kinds of social structure, is, of course, beyond the powers of any one library. But it ought not to be beyond the capacity of every Public Library to treasure up every scrap of printed information relating to the structure and functioning of the social organisations of its own town. Unfortunately, even this is, at the present moment, most imperfectly attended to. In the course of the past six years, during which I have been engaged, with my wife, in writing first, the *History of Trade Unionism*, and latterly, a couple of volumes to be entitled *Industrial Democracy*, I have visited, personally or by deputy, nearly all the Public Libraries in our principal cities, and have

everywhere met with unfailing courtesy from the librarians. In none of them, so far as I know, is there any adequate collection of the printed matter relating to the organisations of their own town. As regards the past, the Manchester Reference Library, the Mitchell Library at Glasgow, the Birmingham Public Library, and the Royal Irish Academy at Dublin, have alone, among provincial libraries, anything worthy to be called a collection of this sort, and even these are in the last degree fragmentary and haphazard.

Even as regards the records and printed matter of our own day, I am afraid these few provincial libraries are collecting their own town literature. Let me run over a few of the actual documents apart from books, pamphlets, and newspapers which are annually printed in each large city. There are first of all the reports, statistics, minutes, and other publications of the Town Council or other municipal governing body; of the School Board, Boards of Guardians, and other public authorities; of the County Council, the neighbouring Parish and District Councils, possibly the local Fisheries Board, or Mines Drainage Board, or other peculiar types of our irregular local government system. Then there are the reports and other documents of the local Voluntary Associations, the Trade Unions and Co-operative Societies, the Friendly Societies, and the Social Clubs; the Employers' Association, the Chamber of Commerce or of Agriculture, the Trade Protection Society, and the local associations and committees of the professions. In another direction we have the proceedings of the innumerable organisations connected with the Churches and Chapels, the local Hospitals and Charities of all kinds, and all the host of local associations connected with games and amusements. The Prison, the Theatre, the Town Market have all their several interests. Everyone of these pieces of social organisation is of importance to the sociologist. The printed documents issued by them, or relating to them, will form an important part of the material from which the social student of the future will write the history of the town or the history of a particular subject, and from which he will draw the inferences and generalisations by which all science advances. The whole of this material, issued as it is almost invariably gratuitously, can be obtained without diverting a single penny from the narrow fund available for purchases of books.

At present there cannot be said to be any systematic collection in this country of these indispensable materials for social investigation.

The almost insuperable hindrance which the absence of such a collection has hitherto put in the way of English students will be made clear by a few examples. At this moment there is perhaps no subject which presents more important problems than the development of local government, the powers and constitutions of municipal and other subordinate governing bodies, and the relation of these to the central government. These very problems are being actually dealt with in France and Germany, America and Australia; and the facts and experience of these and other countries are indispensable to any useful study of our own problems. But it is not only the Foreign and Colonial experience that is inaccessible. We have no systematic collection of the documents and publications of our own English local governing bodies. No central library receives and preserves the reports of our Town Councils and School Boards. Neither the Local Government Board nor the Education Department undertake this task,¹ and, to give one instance out of many, it is impossible, at the present time, to find even a complete list of the towns possessing a municipal water supply. Any careful examination of the municipal experience of our own country is impossible. The very groundwork for any scientific knowledge of local administration is lacking. If we take particular departments of administration, we find the same need. The intricate problems of Poor Relief, for instance, including the treatment of the sick, the aged, and the unemployed, are being met and experimentally treated in nearly all countries; whose experience is pregnant with instruction. Public Education, too, is dealt with by all administrations, often with results from which our own students could learn much. The fiscal arrangements of other countries, especially with regard to local government, are full of suggestiveness and warning. Foreign experience in railway rates and charges is of vital interest to the English manufacturer and agriculturist. But there is no place where the numerous and varied documents on these or other subjects can be studied, though they include reports, accounts and memoranda often of the highest significance to us. Even matters which have become topics of common public discussion are in the same position. It is, for instance, impossible for an English student to find in any library in this country the materials for a precise

¹ During the past year the new Intelligence Department of the Education Department, under the able administration of Messrs. Sadler and Morant, has begun to form an educational library of this sort.

knowledge of the Referendum, or the Second Ballot, or of existing arrangements for the control of the Liquor Traffic.

The magnificent library of the British Museum and libraries like those of the Royal Colonial Institute and the Royal Statistical Society contain, of course, much that is valuable on these subjects. There can be, for instance, no student of Political Science who does not owe a debt of gratitude to the unfailing helpfulness of the administrators of the library of the British Museum. But the library of the British Museum is mainly restricted to regular books (together with newspapers and Parliamentary blue-books) published for sale in this country. It makes no systematic collection of municipal or other official documents issued elsewhere than in London; it can pay but little regard to the publications of such important voluntary developments as Trade Unionism, Friendly Societies, and Co-operation; it is only imperfectly supplied with Foreign books, and still more imperfectly with Foreign pamphlets; it receives only an infinitesimal proportion of the official documents of Foreign Administrations, those of local governing bodies being notably lacking; it is quite inadequately supplied with information as to the local government of our own Colonies, and still more inadequately with that relating to the Colonies of other nations; whilst of the privately printed reports, accounts, rules and other documents, which are often of the highest importance to the students, it is almost necessarily excluded from all but a few of the English organisations, and from practically all those of the Colonies and Foreign Countries. Nor can the British Museum be expected to supply this need. It cannot and ought not to focus its attention on any one subject, and provide a specialist library. Moreover, such material as it does supply is necessarily hidden away by the enormous mass of other matter, and the absence of special subject catalogues. As some index of the present need it may be mentioned that on none of the subjects above-mentioned can a comparative study be made at the British Museum. The first requisite for such a study—an adequate collection of the official documents—is to be found in no public library in this country.

The result is that, in any serious study of Political Science, and especially in the scientific investigation of public administration, England stands at present far behind the United States, France, Germany, and Italy. In all these countries the student who wishes to devote himself to administrative or constitutional

problems finds one or more centres of research, equipped with a considerable collection of the indispensable material. It is no exaggeration to say that some of the problems of Political Science most pressing in their importance to English administrators can be far better studied at the John Hopkins University, Baltimore (with its unrivalled Blüntschi collection of Swiss and other documents), or at Columbia College, New York, than anywhere in this country. A French nobleman, the Vicomte de Chambrun, has lately given no less than £70,000 for the establishment of a library and centre of Research in Paris (*Le Musée Social*) for a similar purpose.

The formation of such a Library of Political Science as is here indicated became a special urgency in connection with the London School of Economics and Political Science. The school, which was established in 1895 with the cordial co-operation of the leading economists and students of political science in the United Kingdom, and with the support of the Society of Arts, and on its commercial side, of the London Chamber of Commerce, aims at providing the same facilities in London as have long been furnished in Paris by the *Ecole Libre des Sciences Politiques*, and by several foreign universities. Although only two years old, its success in attracting students has been immediate and most marked. Between four and five hundred men and women are now at work, more than a third of whom are going through a systematic three-years' course. The subjects dealt with, besides a thorough treatment of economics and the methods of statistics, include the history and principles of banking and currency, commercial history and geography, the law relating to the exchange and distribution of wealth, the development of the English Constitution, the history of local taxation, and the present incidence of rates; whilst special courses have been given on railway economics, trade routes, the referendum, alien immigration, and the administration of the Bank of France. Among the lecturers may be mentioned, in addition to the Director of the School, Professor W. A. S. Hewins (Tooke Professor at King's College), Professor H. S. Foxwell (St. John's College, Cambridge, and University College, London), Professor Edgeworth (Oxford), Rev. Professor Cunningham (Trinity College, Cambridge), the Right Hon. Leonard Courtney, M.P., Sir Courtney Ilbert, Mr. Westlake, Mr. H. J. Mackinder (Reader in Geography to the University of Oxford), Mr. Hubert Hall (of the Public Record Office), Mr. W. M. Acworth, the Hon. Bert-

rand Russell (Trinity College, Cambridge), Mr. Edwin Cannan (Balliol College, Oxford), and Mr. A. L. Bowley (Trinity College, Cambridge, and Guy Silver Medallist of the Royal Statistical Society). Some of the work of the school appears in its series of *Studies in Economic and Political Science*, published by Longmans, Green, and Co., of which three, viz., Mr. Cannan's *History of Local Rates in England*, Mr. Galton's *Documents Relating to the Tailoring Trade*, and the Hon. Bertrand Russell's *German Social Democracy*, have already appeared. But the studies and investigations of the school are seriously hindered by the absence of any adequate collections of sociological material.

No local library can entirely fill this gap. The local libraries may each be asked to collect what relates to its own locality, and for this task they alone are fully fitted, but the student of Political Science needs also a specialist library in some convenient centre, where he may study all that is being done on particular subjects in any locality whatsoever. There has accordingly been established in London, the British Library of Political Science, for the express purpose of forming a central collection of material of this kind. Although only proposed eighteen months ago, dependent entirely on voluntary subscriptions, and only opened in October last, this library has at once secured public support. Towards its establishment, there subscribed statesmen of all political parties, economists of all shades of thought, and social reformers of every creed. The Duke of Devonshire, Lord Rosebery, Mr. Chamberlain and Mr. Balfour; the Archbishop of Canterbury and Cardinal Vaughan; Sir Samuel Montagu and Sir John Lubbock; the Clothworkers' Company and the Trustees of the City Parochial Charities—these are only a few of the long list of its financial supporters. Over a hundred governments and municipalities, representing every civilised country, are already supplying it regularly with materials. Ten thousand volumes—the majority of which are not to be found in any other Public Library in this country—are already on its shelves.

With the aid of specialists on each subject, it is setting itself to acquire a systematic collection of all available material bearing on the structure and function of public administration, central and local, in all parts of the world. Besides purchasing books, it places itself in communication with governments, municipal authorities, and voluntary associations exercising public functions all over the world, with a view to preserving, cataloguing and indexing, all important official documents, reports, accounts,

minutes, etc., not at present collected in any one centre. Special attention is paid to municipal and other local administration. Economics, jurisprudence, and general history form subordinate departments, the dominant central object being always the focussing of attention upon the actual facts and experiences of public administration. Besides serving the needs of the London School of Economics and Political Science, the new library is of course open freely and gratuitously for use by public officials of every kind, researchers and investigators upon its special subjects, and all serious students.

It will be evident that the completeness and general utility of the central collection of sociological materials thus inaugurated will depend on the extent of the support received. The idea cannot be carried into effect without the cordial co-operation of those engaged in public administration. An urgent request is therefore made that members of public bodies, government and municipal officials, and all persons engaged in public work will supply first the Public Library of their own city, and then the British Library of Political Science, with printed reports, bye-laws, standing orders, accounts, etc., relating to any department of public administration at home or abroad. The British Library of Political Science is at present much in need also of (a) Parliamentary papers and reports of the present or of past years; (b) sets, short runs or even odd numbers of the proceedings of legislatures other than those of the United Kingdom and the German Empire; the political and economic quarterlies, the proceedings of the Social Science Association, the *Bankers' Magazine*, and similar works of reference; (c) political and economic pamphlets and other ephemeral literature, especially of past years; (d) books, reports and documents relating to the public administration of India and the Colonies, France, Germany and the United States. Other libraries willing to part with duplicates, or unable to cope with the documents that they receive, are requested to pass them on to the British Library. Any works on politics, economics, history, law, or any branch of public administration, in any language, would also be gratefully received.

The sum necessarily required for such a library is small in comparison with its utility; but small as it is, it cannot, as the law stands, be provided from public funds, either by the Education Department, the Local Government Board, or the County Council. The permanence of the British Library of Political Science is assured, but it cannot reach its fullest useful-

ness without further help. If England is to have a worthy Library of Political Science, an appeal must be made to private donors. No unnecessary expense need be incurred in bricks and mortar, the whole of the contributions being devoted to the purchase of necessary works and to maintenance. A further sum of £5,000 is needed if the library is to be fully equipped and properly maintained. A convenient form of aiding the library would be for persons specially interested in particular subjects, or concerned with particular social problems, to provide for a complete equipment of the library in respect of those subjects or problems. There is, for instance, at present urgent need for a systematic collection of materials with regard to (a) the various methods of dealing with the Drink Traffic; (b) workmen's compensation for accidents, and provision for old age; (c) Public Education; (d) the Housing of the Poor in great cities and in rural districts; (e) tramway administration; (f) comparative Factory Legislation; (g) the constitution and control of local governing bodies; (h) electoral machinery, such as the Second Ballot, the Referendum, etc.; (i) poor relief and the treatment of the unemployed; (j) railway rates and administration; (k) bimetalism and monometallism. A donation of £100 would enable a fairly complete collection of materials to be made on any one of these subjects, which could then be kept up from year to year, and be for ever designated by the name of the donor.¹

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¹ The Solicitor to the Trustees, Mr. J. G. Godard (Messrs. J. N. Mason and Co.), 32, Gresham Street, E.C., will supply all necessary information to those who may be disposed to make a bequest by will or codicil. Donations may be sent either to the Treasurer of the Library Fund, Mr. Sidney Webb, LL.B., L.C.C., Chairman of the Technical Education Board, 41, Grosvenor Road, Westminster Embankment, S.W., or to the Director of the British Library of Political Science (W. A. S. Hewins, M.A.), 10, Adelphi Terrace, London; or else paid to the credit of the Library at the London and County Bank (Covent Garden Branch).