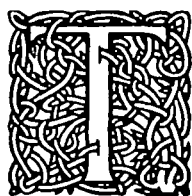


THE LIBRARY ASSOCIATION AT LEEDS.



THE annual meeting of the Library Association, held this year at Leeds, will long be remembered by those who attended it as the most practical and successful of the twenty-six annual meetings that have been held by the Association.

The fact that the capital city of the West Riding is noted for business ability, and that its citizens are practical to a degree, may have contributed to the business-like atmosphere which pervaded the meetings. The number of delegates to the Conference was as large as on any former occasion, and there was a better attendance at all meetings. The excellent programme of papers, carefully arranged to deal with some of the problems which press on Library Committees and Librarians, and the brilliant address of the President (Professor W. MacNeile Dixon of Birmingham) were the main factors in the success of this year's conference.

The devotion of a whole day to the discussion of the relations between Public Education and Public Libraries, and of a morning session to the subject of Branch Libraries, focussed the attention of the delegates upon two subjects of the utmost importance, while at the afternoon session of the third day "The

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Best Books of 1902 " were treated in five divisions by as many experts, a concurrent meeting being held in an adjoining room for the discussion of Library politics, the rate limit, and the delegation of powers to Library Committees.

The public libraries of Leeds are supported and administered with much spirit. It has long been known as a vigorous exponent of the Branch Library idea; and if in the past it tried experiments with branch reading-rooms and libraries in Board Schools which were not exactly successful, yet it can truly be said that the efforts made in Leeds to meet the library wants of a city spread over an unusually large area, were made in the right spirit, and have resulted in the evolution of a system of libraries fully capable of meeting the needs of the city, so far as the limits imposed upon library expenditure will allow. At no time in the thirty-three years since they first began, have the public libraries of Leeds done better work than they are doing at this moment. The buildings of the Central Library, fine as they are, leave something to be desired, but the branch buildings recently opened, and others now being erected, are excellent, and include good reading-rooms for children. A visit paid to one of these branches made a deep impression as to the solid character of the work being done. The children's room especially was crowded with eager youngsters engaged in reading, or waiting to be served with books.

The re-election of Professor Dixon as President of the Association was a compliment fully deserved, and more than justified by the scholarly address

with which he opened the Conference and the ability with which he presided over the proceedings. His lofty view of the mission of libraries as the universities of later life, if not exactly new, was certainly put forward in a new sense and in striking language. 'If,' he said, 'the exigencies of modern life, the struggle for a livelihood, to which nations as well as individuals seem now committed, if the requirements of man's physical nature usurp more and more for technical training, for what the Germans call *Brodstudien*, the years at his disposal in youth, then it may be that, save for the privileged few, the library, the free school of the people, will become the best, perhaps the only school of the humanities, may serve an end not hitherto foreseen, attain an uncomputed power and fulfil an uncalculated destiny. It may assist the student of the days to come to do for himself what his schools and teachers fail to do, conduct him to higher levels than they, to a sympathetic communion with the hopes and fears, the achievements and ideals of the race. For, however narrow the intellectual horizon of the reader who frequents the library for purposes of a particular study, he must there meet with evidence of interests wider than his own; he must there breathe "an ampler æther, a diviner air" than among his own few books; he must there learn how rich and varied are the paths the mind can follow, how full the heaven is of stars, of how vast a world he is privileged to be an inhabitant. And if the school or the society in which his early years are spent offer a meagre nourishment, a barren diet for the soul, or endeavour to imprison him

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within the walls of some contracted interest or sapless creed, here at least he can regain his freedom and claim his intellectual birthright. For it is not one of the least advantages of a library that within its quiet precincts no man is asked to subscribe to any scientific or theological dogma, or harassed by the *dicta* of the schools. There is no other such catholic institution, none founded upon principles so magnificently liberal. Amid its peaceful persuasions, many a student has found and will find his proper home, has felt and will feel "how inexhaustibly the spirit grows," and amid its eloquent silences pursuing his thought, perhaps, through difficult and clouded way, will look up to find—

"Day, like a mighty river, flowing in."

'One foresees for the public library a widening horizon, an increasing purpose, since to it alone, of all institutions which have the things of mind for their province, no limits are prescribed. Unrestricted by any conservative principles, it cannot fall behind—a fate that may even for a season overtake the university—it cannot as long as opinions are expressed in books fall behind the advancing tide of thought nor lose touch with the requirements of men; it cannot from its very constitution be other than "the heir of all the ages, in the foremost files of time." And so it comes that the education given by the library may be regarded as supplementary or even corrective to that which schools and colleges provide. It may even be described as the university of later life, the university one is never too old to enter and is never called upon to

leave, which prescribes no rigid order and no hours of study, entertains no prejudices against this subject or in favour of that, imposes no test upon its students and expresses no discouraging preference for the brilliant over the duller intellects. Its circle is one of the noblest inclusiveness, it remains

“A world above man’s head to let him see
How boundless might his soul’s horizon be.”

—The proceedings of the second day were of unusual interest by reason of the attendance of a number of delegates representing such educational bodies as the National Union of Teachers, the Head Masters’ Association, the various University Extension centres, the National Home Reading Union, and other bodies. The invitation to these kindred associations to send representatives to discuss the relations between education and libraries was formulated at the previous annual meeting. The response made to the invitation, the excellent addresses delivered by several of the delegates, and the evident sympathy with the aims and aspirations of the librarians, augur well for the future. All the representatives of other societies present, with the council of the Library Association, were appointed a committee to consider the whole question and to draw up a report for presentation to the next conference. Such a step must remove many misconceptions on the part of educationists as to the work of the libraries, and may result in an epoch-making report. At any rate, it is a great thing to have brought the librarians and the teachers a little closer together; to have clasped hands across a

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chasm may lead to a bridge between school and library which in time will kill the remembrance that the chasm was once almost impassable. It is without doubt in this direction that the salvation of the public libraries must be sought.

It remains to be seen whether the invitation given this year to delegates from other educational bodies has aroused enough interest in the subject of libraries to induce those other bodies in their turn to invite the Library Association to send delegates to discuss the relations between libraries and education at the Teachers' Conferences.

The address by Mrs. Fairchild, of the Library School at Albany, New York State, on 'Schools and Libraries in America,' was enjoyed by everyone. She spoke with a freedom from convention, and with such a full knowledge of her subject, that she completely carried the audience with her. In America, as in this country, it is worthy of remark that the first effort to bring the schools and libraries together proceeded from the libraries, and that in some cases the advances were received coldly. The remedy was found in the United States by seeing that the Normal Schools in which the teachers are trained were well supplied in the matter of books. That is a most sensible and practical way of going to the root of a difficulty. Under the new Education Act some move on similar lines may be possible in connection with the Normal Colleges in this country; but in large districts, where the pupil teachers are taught at one central school, a move might be made at once to supply a library for the teachers in training there. If the public libraries

cannot face all the responsibilities of a complete scheme of school libraries, they might prepare for the future to this extent.

It would appear from Mrs. Fairchild's remarks that there is a fundamental difference between the idea of a school library in the United States and that in Great Britain. In the States the library supplied to the school is not a collection of books for general reading, but of books especially relating to the work of the school; in Mrs. Fairchild's own words, 'The books sent to a school should be to enrich the school instruction.' On this side of the Atlantic exactly the opposite idea prevails. The school library is for general reading, not a part of the school apparatus. It is intended to develop a taste for reading which, when school life is over, will hand on to 'the universities of later life' an army of readers capable of appreciating what is best in literature, not as now an army of people who have been taught the art of reading, but not how and what to read, who use their ill-balanced gift to swell the ranks of the half-educated, the bane of present-day letters.

The morning session having been wholly given to the children, the conference turned in the afternoon to the consideration of the adults. Contributions on the 'Work of the National Home Reading Union in its bearing upon the educational use of the Public Library,' by Dr. Hill, the Master of Downing College, and on 'Technical Libraries' by Mr. Jast, Librarian of Croydon, formed the groundwork of the discussions. Dr. Hill is an enthusiastic supporter of the National Home Reading

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Union, and rightly so, for the Union's aims are good, but somehow the libraries and the Union have never quite hit it off together. One cause of this may be the long-winded and involved circulars sent out from time to time by the Union. Many, besides librarians, must have been deterred from taking an interest in the work of the Union on this account. But there is also another difficulty. It is the strength of the rate-supported library that there is no need to be continually worrying readers for money. Beyond the purchase of a catalogue—and even that is optional—the public library reader may go on year after year without any money passing between the reader and the librarian. But the Home Reading Union exists upon the subscriptions of its members and donations from its friends, and is hard put to it to pay its way. This is a matter for regret; but it explains much that is otherwise difficult to understand. For the Public Libraries to adopt a policy which would destroy the feeling of freedom from financial considerations now enjoyed by their readers, would be a serious step to take. For this reason, as things stand, the relations between the Home Reading Union and the Public Libraries cannot become very close.

The work of the afternoon was summed up in a resolution urging the local authorities, under the new Education Act, to make provision for the establishment and maintenance of technical libraries in every centre where technical instruction is given. Some difference of opinion existed as to whether such libraries should form part of the public library or be placed in the technical schools. The point is

unimportant at this stage. The main thing is to get the principle accepted by the education authority, and to induce that authority to promote efficiency and prevent overlapping by placing the direction of the technical libraries in the same hands as the public libraries.

The final day of the Conference was a very full one—too full, in fact, because in the afternoon members had to choose between the valuable series of papers on the best books of the year, and the important discussions on the delegation of powers to library committees and on the vexed question of rate limitation. The morning session on branch libraries was also overloaded with five papers, the discussions being rather futile in consequence. A capital exhibition of plans, views, and statistical data relative to branches had been arranged; and if adequate time had been available for this important subject to be properly considered, much good might have resulted. It is to be hoped that at a future Conference it will be again included in the programme, with plenty of time for full discussion, and that the figures contained in the papers will be printed beforehand to enable members to grasp their import. Mr. Sutton, of Manchester, for example, gave some useful comparative figures as to the average population served by the branches in different towns, ranging from an average of 118,339 persons to each branch in Liverpool, down to 25,000 per branch, or perhaps less, in other places. It was quite impossible to take down the figures as they were read out, and until the paper is printed these and other similar details cannot be considered.

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The papers on branches bristled with figures relating to all sorts of matters—income, expenditure, areas of library districts, areas served by branches, populations, and many other like details, all necessary, but most bewildering, when simply read out rapidly to comply with the exigencies of an overcrowded programme.

To the present writer the net result of the Leeds Conference on the branches question is a conviction that the subject requires much more consideration and discussion than it has yet received. There is certainly room for great improvement in the planning of branches. In London the position is quite different from that in the Provinces, as indeed is the case with most library problems, a fact which is not altogether realized. Branches in London are self-contained institutions, and ought to be called District Libraries or by some such name, to distinguish them from the Branch Libraries in the Provinces, the true branches, because they are not self-contained, but only branches of a large central library. The provincial branch library is almost invariably a reading-room or rooms, and a distributing centre for books for home reading, relieving the central lending library from the strain of having too many customers, and taking the books nearer to the homes of those who for various reasons cannot use the central library. The ultimate work of the branch libraries in the Provinces will probably be to provide books for those who do not require to go deeply into any subject, and those who read only for recreation, leaving the central library, lending and reference, free to cater chiefly

for students and scholars. In London, where people do not know anything of what goes on two streets from their own dwelling-place such a theory of libraries would not be suitable.

The Provincial Branch Libraries may therefore be planned in a much simpler way than, to judge by the plan exhibited, has been the practice hitherto. The whole subject of branches requires further treatment, and it is desirable, in view of the rapid increase in the number of branches now taking place, that the time for dealing with it should not be unduly delayed.

At one of the two afternoon meetings Mr. Councillor Lucas, Chairman of the Blackpool Library Committee, introduced in an able address the question of the relations between Library Committees and the Borough Councils, or Urban District Councils as the case might be. Under the Libraries Act the Council is the 'Library Authority,' but may, if it thinks fit, delegate some (not all) of its powers to a Committee. This Committee may consist wholly of members of the Council, or it may include non-Council members. The greatest possible diversities of practice have grown up all over the country in consequence of this provision in the Libraries' Act. Mr. Lucas contended that the delegation of all such powers as can be legally delegated, to a Committee which thereby becomes more or less independent of the Council, is contrary to the spirit of the times. He thinks that the tendency is to concentrate all local administration in one body, the Council, and that for the libraries to stand aloof and claim independence for the Committees does

harm to the library cause, by keeping them outside the main stream of municipal life. There is certainly much sound sense in Mr. Lucas's arguments, and however local conditions may stand in the way, yet, in view especially of the operation of the new Education Act, it seems fairly clear that the semi-independent Library Committee has become an anomaly in local government. The School Boards have gone, and so have the Technical Instruction Committees (the only parallel to the Library Committees). The most recent of the adoptive acts, the Museums and Gymnasiums Act, does not give the power to appoint non-members of the Council on the Committee, or to delegate any powers.

In the main Mr. Lucas is right, though some of his arguments were based upon abuses of the Libraries Act and its powers, due to failure on the part of Councils to do their duty. The power under the Act remains absolutely with the Council, which is expressly named as the Library Authority. Only the day-to-day administration of the libraries can be delegated to the Committees, and even that with such reservations as the Council may think fit to impose. The Committee is appointed and may be removed by the Council; and all questions relating to buildings, rates and loans, remain absolutely with the Council.

The present state of things is the outcome of conditions which are rapidly passing away. Municipal Government is no longer a matter of paving and sewerage, cleansing and lighting. The existence of special acts authorizing local authorities to establish and maintain libraries and museums is now

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an anomaly. These things belong to the routine of duties to be performed by the local governing body, and if any consolidation of the acts relating to local government should take place, libraries and museums would naturally fall into line with other municipal undertakings.

Closely allied to the topic dealt with by Mr. Lucas was the question of the rate limitation introduced by Mr. Councillor Abbott of Manchester. He quoted some striking figures showing the unfairness of the rateable value as a basis for the library income, and stated that a large number of Borough and Urban District Councils had passed resolutions in favour of the removal of the rate limit. The bill drafted by the honorary solicitor of the Association (Mr. Fovargue) had not been introduced during the last session of Parliament because of the crowded state of business; but he urged the advisability of proceeding upon the lines already agreed to at the previous Conference. A resolution directing the Council of the Association to re-appoint a Committee with full power to promote the bill was agreed to with one dissentient.

The Library Association has still plenty of important work before it. The programme for the Newcastle-upon-Tyne meetings next year should follow upon the excellent lines of this year's Conference, avoiding details of library practice and grappling with the principles of library efficiency and progress, and above all giving more time for each subject.

JOHN BALLINGER.