

The value of such experiments depends entirely on the knowledge and skill acquired by the local librarian and on the interest and vision of the local authority and Library Committee. In fact, it is the first concern of the good librarian to ensure that the Committee is aware of the real aims of a library service. Without such a good librarian it is difficult, if not impossible, for a local authority to be kept informed of current trends and of policies which can be initiated to improve the local service. Very often it has been found that in free libraries which have had librarians without adequate qualifications the service has remained static or has even deteriorated, and the local authority has not been stimulated to improve it.

There are some local authorities, though they are few in number, which have the same view of their library as John Cotton Dana, the eminent American library pioneer, who wrote in 1898 :—

The thing that is of great consequence . . . is the work that the library does from day to day in stimulating the inquiring spirit, in adding to the interest of things, and in broadening the minds of the . . . people. . . . That is to say, the public library is chiefly concerned not in the products of education as shown in the finished book, but in the process of education as shown in the development and training of the library user, of the general public.

That the importance of this "process of education" and of the wider implications of the public library is often overlooked has been shown by advertisements during the last year for librarians in boroughs where supervision and cleaning of the women's rest-rooms formed part of the scheduled duties.

Of the students who have passed through the three professional courses of the New Zealand Library School, only three have found positions in public libraries serving a population of under 10,000. This directly reflects the low salaries offered, which in all but a very few cases are grossly inadequate for the qualifications and energy required for organizing real library service.

In the last annual report of this Service there was a discussion of the types of subject book collections which local libraries should attempt to build up to meet the needs of their people. In only a few libraries has there been any improvement noted in the provision by local authorities for book purchases for their own libraries. Where the local authority allocation is low, and in all but a few libraries it is less than the 2s. 6d. per head originally set down as a minimum, provision for books for the free collection is so inadequate as to make it impossible to give the service the public should get from a free library.

Even on a budget of 2s. 6d. per head of population, however, it is hardly possible to provide qualified staffing and an adequate book fund. Experience has shown that it is only those libraries which build up a good free stock of their own that use the resources of this Service to the fullest advantage. Although there would appear to be only four free libraries participating in this Service making provision of over 3s. per head of population, there is the example of one local authority with a population just under 5,000 which allocates 4s. 8d. per head. This appears to cover staffing of a good standard and an expenditure of over £340 a year on books for the free collection. Thus the library's own book stock, which covers a wide range of subject material, stimulates the use of the headquarters stock of this Service to the extent of approximately 800 requests a year. At the other extreme, it is not uncommon to find that libraries with poor free collections of their own use the request service less than once a month.

It should be noted that there are some local authorities which, while recognizing the value and importance of a library service, find that their increasing commitments in other fields prevent them from rating for library services to the extent necessary for their development. In many countries overseas it has been the practice for the State to make subsidies available to those local authorities which make an honest attempt to provide good library services.