

It will be seen from the foregoing table that fiction represents slightly more than half, or 52 per cent., of the whole stock. Of the classified books, or non-fiction, the following were the percentages, expressed not in terms of the whole stock, but of non-fiction stock:—

Percentages of Various Classes of Non-fiction.						
General works	..	..	..	..	..	1·57
Philosophy and psychology	..	..	..	..	..	4·47
Religion	..	..	..	..	..	2·70
Social sciences	..	..	..	..	..	9·30
Philology and language	..	..	..	..	..	0·30
Natural or pure sciences	..	..	..	..	..	5·80
Applied science and useful arts	..	..	..	..	..	14·08
Fine arts and recreations	..	..	..	..	..	16·00
Literature (excluding fiction)	..	..	..	..	..	6·70
History, travel, and biography	..	..	..	..	..	38·80
						100·00

Comments on Book Stock.

It is still too early, seeing that the process of building up of stock is incomplete, for a critical analysis to be made of the percentage figures given above. In a year's time it should be possible to compare the strength of the holdings of the Service in various types of books with the issues of each type made to libraries.

PRINCIPLES GUIDING SELECTION OF BOOKS.

A determined effort has been made to get libraries interested in the many kinds of books to which they have not been accustomed—books on social questions, child study, health, diet and nutrition, games and outdoor sports, music, art, gardening, and many other topics. Nearly all the small libraries in this country rely on fiction for their main appeal to their borrowers. All libraries receiving loans of books from the Service have had 50 per cent. of fiction; many of them have been allowed 60 per cent. To increase the proportion of fiction in the whole stock, and thus finally in the loans to libraries, would be easy, but fatal to the ultimate success of any programme for country-wide free library service, because local authorities and the people themselves would reject public financial support for what would amount to a free and perhaps harmless institution for recreation. It has not occurred to many intelligent people that libraries should be publicly supported, simply because of the types of books that are available from most libraries.

One extremely important aim of the Service must therefore be to help libraries to become useful and cultural as well as recreational institutions. The amount of fiction available need not be diminished if the proportion is not increased while that of general books is increased.

PUBLIC LIBRARIES : THE PEOPLE'S UNIVERSITIES ?

“ I have recently travelled throughout the country examining the educational work of the large libraries. As an educator I was profoundly impressed by the important work they could do if adequately supported. They are in a very real sense the ‘people’s universities.’ Every one agrees that education does not accomplish its end as it is limited to the work of the schools. In a democracy it is necessary that education should be carried forward into mature life primarily by reading. . . . I believe that the educational work performed by the library costs less in proportion to its value than any other part of our public system.” The quotation is from Dr. Alvin Johnson’s recent book “The Public Library : A People’s University.”

It is clear that public libraries, properly administered and adequately supported financially, can do much towards education in New Zealand. The responsibility of local authorities, organized groups of interested citizens, and individuals in this matter cannot be overemphasized.

The establishment of good libraries is an elementary step in the process of giving significance to the high proportion of literacy in this country. Intelligent and useful citizens should develop with the aid of libraries, not in spite of the lack of them.

I have, &c.,
G. T. ALLEY, Officer in Charge.

Approximate Cost of Paper.—Preparation, not given ; printing (960 copies), £8 10s.