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LIBRARIES AND PERIODICALS
A NOTE ON CO-ORDINATION

by Basil ANDERTON,

Public Librarian of Newcastle-upon-Tyne.

That there are books « which no gentleman's library is complete without » has long been a truism both of advertisement and of fact. Certain books of reference and certain classics of literature, of history or of science must necessarily form part of the equipment of every scientific or literary man's collection of books, if that collection is to be dignified by the name of a library.

And as in private libraries, so in public libraries. In every town the different libraries must have each on its own shelves certain books, such as dictionaries, grammars, cyclopaedias, biographies, and the various indispensable text books. Even in the case of the weightier general periodicals some amount of duplication is likewise necessary, in order to meet the requirements of the many readers who wish to keep abreast of the social and political and intellectual movements of the times.

But when we come to books and periodicals in which special subjects are treated in a way that appeals only to advanced scholars and students, the circumstances are somewhat changed. Probably if each library had unlimited means, it might desire to procure all the learned periodicals, and all the transactions of important societies, and all the great treatises for itself. It would desire to do so partly in order

to attract scholars, and so increase its fame as a great library, and partly in order to support and encourage by means of its subscriptions the societies themselves and the writers of the treatises.

The public to which such learned societies and writers can appeal being necessarily limited, every assured subscription that can be registered strengthens and makes more stable the cause of intellectual progress. It is however very seldom the case that funds are thus abundant. Very few libraries can in this fashion afford to procure the transactions of all the learned societies and to purchase the books of all the learned authors even of their own country, to say nothing of those of all European countries, or those of the whole civilised world in general.

A selection has in almost every case to be made ; and it is when we have to consider this selection that the question of co-ordination between different libraries becomes an important and a practical question.

The object of such co-ordination, if the different libraries could be induced to do this work in common, would of course be (so far as readers were concerned) to secure the most profitable variety of expensive books and special periodicals or transactions, and so to benefit to the utmost the advanced students in a given town, or even, conceivably, in adjacent towns.

The method of such co-ordination would doubtless be for representatives of the different libraries in a town (or adjacent towns) to meet together and decide, first of all, what funds each could spare for this special class of publications ; then, what publications of their own or of foreign countries were most appropriate to their purpose ; then, which works each library should undertake to procure ; and lastly, they would arrange such details as the mode of admitting the readers of one library to the use of these publications in the other libraries ; and the best means of making known to the public concerned in which particular library the various works might be consulted.

Let us deal with the case of the serial publications only. With regard to the first question, viz : the selection of the

best publications, it is quite possible that local or patriotic considerations might lead to a certain amount of duplication.

It might seem advisable for instance to have available for use more than one copy of the transactions of local societies; or to support, by more than one subscription from each town, the learned societies of one's own country in preference to those of other countries. But granting that such considerations as these were regarded as being to some extent valid, the field of selection would still be not a little enlarged by such concerted action, and it would be far easier to bring into one's town more of the best intellectual life of other towns and other lands than is the case when each single library is regarded as an independent unit, and makes its own individual selection. An illustration will make this point clear.

Dr Thomas Muir, a mathematician, and the Superintendent of Education in South Africa read a paper, in 1905, before the Royal Society of Edinburgh, entitled « Library Aids to Mathematical Research ». After pointing out that no country can afford to neglect the wants of the working specialist, who, after all, is the original source of supply for all readers, he proceeded to review what was being done, by certain libraries of Edinburgh and Glasgow more particularly, for the benefit of such specialists in the single subject of mathematics. He tabulated 67 mathematical serials produced in different countries. Of these Austria issued 4, Belgium 2, Denmark 1, France 12, Germany 12, Holland 3, Hungary 3, Italy 9, Japan 1, Norway 1, Poland 2, Portugal 2, Russia 3, Sweden 1, United Kingdom 6, United States 5. Of these 67, he found that 34 only were taken in the combined libraries of Edinburgh and Glasgow. Ten possessed by Edinburgh were not to be found in Glasgow, and two possessed by Glasgow were not to be found in Edinburgh. On the other hand, 21 that were available in the one city were duplicated in the other.

Dr Muir continued as follows :

« As regards Edinburgh alone, it has to be noted that 13 serials are duplicated in libraries within a short walk of each

other ; but that 18 are not duplicated, 11 being possessed by the Royal Society and not by the University, and 7 by the University and not by the Royal Society.

The like facts for Glasgow are even more striking. There the University has 19 serials not found elsewhere in the city, while the Philosophical Society has 4 duplicated by the University, and no others at all ».

Dr Muir considered that, as a result of this state of things, mathematical research could only be pursued in Scotland with difficulty and uncertainty, and that research in mathematical history was practically an impossibility. The remedy he proposed for such troubles was *co-operation between libraries*. He calculated that £ 100 annually would purchase the whole of the serials in question, and thought that this expense might be distributed amongst the different library authorities.

It is possible that there are not a great many towns whose libraries, even acting in conjunction, could afford to spend a full £ 100 a year on mathematical serials, seeing that there are so many other subjects, each with a wide periodical literature of its own, entitled to equal consideration with mathematics, e.g. philosophy, history, classics, philology, archaeology, physics, chemistry, engineering, etc. Yet this difficulty might possibly be got over if adjacent towns could co-operate ; and in any case, as said before, a great advance would be made and a great benefit to mathematical scholars would be secured if some such systematic method of dealing with the question could be adopted.

Once the general question of co-operation were settled, the details of working could probably be arranged without great difficulty. Of course, when a library took charge of one particular serial it would endeavour wherever practicable to make that serial complete from the beginning.

University libraries or subscription libraries, which generally admit their own circle only to the shelves, would be prepared, for the special purpose in view, to admit also outside readers if duly accredited by other co-operating libraries. If the terms of their constitution made this

impossible, then either the constitution might be modified, or at the worst the other libraries might, on payment of a subscription be admitted to their membership, and thus become entitled to send « delegates » (in other words, their readers) to consult the books. Such obstacles can usually be surmounted somehow or other if there is a serious intention of surmounting them.

These points settled, there remains only the preparation of a joint list, or union catalogue, of the serials in question, and the clear indication in it of the libraries in which the different periodicals may be consulted.

In conclusion, and by way of illustration, perhaps what has been done in Newcastle-upon-Tyne may be thought not uninteresting. Though the desirability of some co-ordination in the matter of buying expensive books had been apparent for some time, no definite scheme had been arranged before 1908. On seeing a copy of Dr. Muir's paper however I determined to see whether a practical start could not be made, at all events in the matter of periodicals.

Accordingly a circular explaining what was in contemplation was sent out and a meeting of representatives from several institutions of our city was arranged, in order that the possibilities of joint action might be discussed. All the representatives agreed that some such scheme would be advantageous. Finally, however, from one consideration or another, only a single library was prepared to join us in taking immediate steps to realise a scheme; that was the Library of Armstrong College (Durham University). Of the remaining institutions, one was at the time too busy with other matters to go thoroughly into the question; another purchased only the periodicals which specially appealed to its members, and as these lived to a large extent outside the city boundaries, it was doubtful if a change of the sort contemplated would be cordially welcomed or would be of practical benefit; and so with the others.

Whilst the general idea was praised by all, excellent reasons were given for deferring its immediate realisation.

With the representatives from Armstrong College,

however, the case was different. They thought that there was no time like the present for doing something to remedy the overlapping which so obviously restricted the outlook of our students and their means of scholarly research.

Mathematics was chosen as a point of departure.

The outcome of the meeting was a proposal to this effect:

That the Public Library should stop taking the following mathematical periodicals (to which for the last few years the College has subscribed):

London Mathematical Society, Journal de Mathématiques, Quarterly Journal of Mathematics, Fortschritte der Mathematik, Mathematische Annalen;

And should take instead the following (which are not purchased at the College):

Annali di Matematica: Tortolini, Bulletin de la Société Mathématique de France, Atti dei Lincei, Zeitschrift für Mathematik: Schlömilch, Giornali di Matematiche: Battaglini.

As there was with one small exception, no overlapping in the other mathematical serials taken by the two institutions, subscriptions should continue unchanged. Thus two of our libraries, though not opulent, could secure between them 25 important periodicals on mathematics — quite apart from other publications which happen to be coming out in parts.

This was moved by the Professor of Mathematics (Mr. C. M. Jessop, M. A.), and was supported by Dr. P. P. Bedson, Professor of Chemistry.

I reported this recommendation to the Public Libraries Committee, who were good enough to approve of what had been done, and who sanctioned the trying of the experiment for a year. The Library Committee of Armstrong College likewise gave their consent and approval.

It now remained to work out the details of the scheme. These were settled between myself and the Curators of the College Library (Professor J. Wight Duff, M. A., and the above-named Professor P. P. Bedson, M. A., D. Sc.). The necessary regulations were made and forms of recommendation were printed, by means of which the readers of one institution could be admitted on special tickets to the use of

all the mathematical journals in the other institution. A list of all the journals was also printed and exhibited in both libraries.

These preliminaries being concluded a start in the actual working was made some months ago. No difficulties have so far arisen, and the general impression that the idea is quite workable has already led to our quietly feeling the way towards an extension of the scheme to the periodicals relating to Greek and Latin Classics and Archaeology, and to Natural Science.

On these matters we shall before long report to our respective Committees, and we trust that they will approve of such further suggestions as we make no less cordially than they supported our recommendations in the first instance.

Briefly, now that the first lines of work in common have been laid down, it seems not improbable that several interesting developments will in due course be made.

