

SESSION II.
1906.
NEW ZEALAND.

GENERAL ASSEMBLY LIBRARY:

REPORT OF THE CHIEF LIBRARIAN FOR THE YEAR 1905-6.

Laid-on the Table by Leave of the House.

The CHIEF LIBRARIAN to the Hon. the CHAIRMAN OF THE LIBRARY COMMITTEE.

SIR,—

I have the honour to submit the following report for the year 1905-6 :—

RECESS LIBRARY COMMITTEE.

This Committee, under the chairmanship of W. Fraser, Esq., M.H.R., held five meetings during the recess. Two special selection meetings were held, when lists of books for order were brought forward by the Chief Librarian and duly considered. Two large orders were sent to the High Commissioner for transmission to Messrs. Sotheran and Co. The majority of the works ordered are now on the Library tables.

RECESS PRIVILEGES.

The number of persons to whom recess privileges were granted (independent of those on the "full privilege" list) was 397. An excellent class of work was favoured by borrowers, who greatly esteem the privilege and express themselves highly grateful therefor. The books have been well used and there has been no loss. No novels (save what might be called English classic fiction) are issued to the holders of the ordinary recess privileges.

BOXES TO MEMBERS.

Over a hundred baskets of books were sent to members during the recess.

ADDITIONS TO LIBRARY.

The total number of volumes added to the Library during the year was 2,706. There are now 62,000 books on the Library registers. There were no receipts from private Bills during the Library year, hence a decrease in the number of books added. If, however, we can maintain an annual average of 2,500 volumes (and this, I think, can be done with our ordinary income) the Library will be making excellent progress. A reference to the new Accession List for the year 1905-6 will show members that the Library has been enriched during the year by some very fine works.

Among the principal donations to be recorded are a set of Andrew Marvell's works (the fine quarto edition) which was presented by Sir John Hall, and a copy of Sir Morell Mackenzie's work "The Illness and Death of the Emperor Frederick of Germany," the insertion of an autograph letter from the author (a letter of no small historical interest and importance) rendering the volume of great interest and value. This latter work was presented by Dr. Bakewell, of Auckland. I have also to acknowledge the gift by Captain Robinson, R.E., of a charming little edition (1685) of "Les Caractères de Thèophraste." In each instance a formal letter of thanks was sent to the donor.

NEW ZEALAND BOOKS.

In accordance with instructions given last year by the Library Committee a second case for the housing of books dealing with New Zealand and Polynesia has been procured. It is constructed of fine cedar, and is similar in design to the first case, with, however, some structural improvements. The two cases have now been placed at the head of the main staircase. This has enabled me to have the corner in the main reading-room formerly occupied by the first New Zealand case fitted with steel shelving similar to that used throughout the Library. This will afford room for about fifteen hundred volumes, and the space-pressure to which I drew attention in last year's report is thereby removed. The proposed extra bays will now not be wanted for some time to come. The settees formerly at the head of the stairs have been placed in the reading-room, where they will be very useful.

LIBRARY DECORATIONS AND FITTINGS.

I would draw attention to the necessity which exists for completing the decoration of the Library. The main reading-room, it is true, was decorated when the building was first put into use as a Library, but the distemping of the walls can only be regarded as a temporary expedient, and in many places shows signs of wear. Now that the walls are thoroughly dry I would suggest that the Public Works Department should be asked to have them properly painted. The same remark applies to the ground-floor rooms. Nothing has been done in the way of decorating the lobby on the ground floor and the walls of the staircase. These still wear a bare and sepulchral appearance, the general effect, which is cold and forbidding, being frequently the subject of unfavourable comment by visitors. I would strongly urge the Committee to apply to the Public Works Department for the decoration of the walls of these rooms and the lobby in some comprehensive and tasteful scheme, and would further suggest that a sub-committee be set up to act with myself in conferring with the Public Works Department officials as to the exact design to be adopted.

Several members having complained of the insufficient lighting of the newspaper-room, I have arranged with the Public Works Department for the main chandeliers to be lowered and for two new drop lights to be placed in position over the fireplace at the Hill Street end. These alterations will, I trust, be made before this report comes before the Committee, and will, I hope, remove all cause of complaint.

The basement floor has been fitted up with the radiator heating apparatus, the danger of dampness and consequent injury to the books being thereby greatly decreased.

The basement prism lights continue to break; but where they have been replaced by others of a new and improved make, now supplied by the Public Works Department, there is, I notice, no further breakage. I would recommend that the Department be requested to take out all the remaining prisms of the old make, and replace them by new ones. This would be much better than doing the work piecemeal, as it not unfrequently happens that water comes into the basement before the broken prisms are noticed.

THE POST-OFFICE.

As I understand that a scheme of alteration and reconstruction of the Parliament Buildings is now under consideration, and may be proceeded with next recess, I would urge the Committee to renew its recommendation, first made some six years ago, that the post-office be removed from the Library and placed elsewhere, under the charge of competent, expert postal officials, instead of being, as at present, worked by the Library staff with the assistance of a sessional mailman. Of late years the number of mails made up each day has greatly increased, and the work is quite beyond the capacity of one mailman. I have made application to the Post Office Department for assistance in this matter of despatch and reception of mails, but my application met with a point-blank refusal. A similar application for assistance from the sessional messenger staff was also refused. As I cannot allow the regular Library assistants to leave their legitimate duties to do what is purely postal work (work which I contend should be performed by properly trained postal officers) there is sometimes a delay in the work for which I decline to be held responsible. There are, I may add, no facilities in the building for money-order business, and members wishing to send away or to cash such orders have to go outside to the Molesworth Street Post-office. Owing also to there being only one mailman, there is often a delay in the delivery of registered correspondence. I mention these matters to strengthen my contention that the post-office should be removed from the Library. It is hard upon the Library assistants and myself to be blamed for inconveniences for which they and I are not fairly to be considered responsible. I believe that if representations were made by the Committee to the Postmaster-General an improvement might be effected.

GENERAL REMARKS.

During the year several publications have been received under the provisions of the General Assembly Library Act.

The thanks of the Library are due to the High Commissioner for his kindness in sending out various interesting pamphlets; to Messrs. Sotheran and Co., and Messrs. Street and Co. for their prompt and careful execution of the orders intrusted to them; and to Mr. Mackay, the Government Printer, whose prompt attention to our requirements deserves special mention.

The various members of the staff have worked well during the year, and an exceptionally large amount of repairing and rebinding has been done by the Library binder, Mr. Roberts. During the recess an extra assistant, Mr. Cook (kindly placed at my disposal by Sir Joseph Ward, Colonial Secretary) was occupied in thoroughly overhauling and rearranging the contents of the basement. The bound newspapers have been arranged in better order, and some three to four thousand volumes hitherto not appearing on the Library records were duly entered on the Accessions Register.

As usual a very large number of visitors were shown round the Library during the recess. In several instances persons interested in library economy spent some time in examining and taking notes of the card-catalogue system, and other features of the institution.

LIBRARY ACCOUNTS.

In an appendix will be found the Library balance-sheet for the year ended the 31st March, 1906, with a copy of the auditor's certificate.

I have, &c.,

CHARLES WILSON, Chief Librarian.

