

and the proportion of the 17,400 centres in Great Britain which fall below that minimum has steadily fallen. In England in 1928-29, 60 per cent. of the centres held less than 100 books; now the proportion is only 19.1 per cent.

The consignments should be changed at least twice a year, so that at the lowest computation the smallest group should receive 100 volumes in a year.

INTERLENDING SERVICE.

The work of the district bureau thus far outlined deals with what are usually known as popular libraries—that is, libraries which are rather recreational and entertaining in purpose than educational and serious.

The “national” service which the more advanced countries to-day aim at, and which it is highly desirable New Zealand should develop, provides also for the more serious reader, the large class of men and women who desire something other than fiction. They may be “students” in the accepted sense of being enrolled at some educational institution, or they may be ordinary men and women who wish to read serious books—*i.e.*, works other than fiction—and are not within reach of a library which possesses what they require.

For this class of people the district organizes an interlending service, through which the whole of the resources of existing libraries in a district will be made accessible to serious readers who cannot get what they require in their own locality. The main instrument of this service is the Union Catalogue, a composite catalogue of all the non-fiction books in the district, the cards indicating what libraries have copies of each book and whether they are willing to lend to approved readers. Suppose a reader living near Gore wished to borrow a volume of some non-fiction work, say, Frazer’s “Golden Bough” or Motley’s “Dutch Republic,” he would first of all ask at the Gore Coronation Library. If Gore had no copy in stock the librarian would send the request on to the district bureau—in, say, Dunedin. The Union Catalogue would show perhaps that the Oamaru Public Library had a copy and was willing to lend it. The book would then be sent on to Gore and lent to the reader on the responsibility of the Gore Library. If Oamaru was willing to lend the book only under what are known as “reference” conditions, the reader would require to attend at the Gore Library to consult the book there. If a reader were out of touch with any local library, he would write direct to the district bureau, which, on locating an inactive copy of the book, would send it to him by post.

In some countries the borrower pays postage one way or both. In Prussia there is a fixed charge of 10 pfennig (say, 2d.) to the borrower.

It is very desirable that the Union Catalogue of a district should embrace the non-fiction contents of all libraries in the area. Even though some libraries might not be willing to lend their books, it is important to be able to locate a wanted copy and intimate to the inquirer where it can be seen. University libraries and special collections like that of the Royal New Zealand Society would possibly be unwilling to lend books as a general rule except to their own members. If so, there are good grounds for hoping that they would be willing, at any rate, to incorporate their entries in the Union Catalogue of the district and to indicate to what extent they would make their stock available for serious readers in the district.

The Union Catalogue should also contain entries for the serial publications, and continuations of all descriptions which are held and subscribed to by any of the libraries in the district. Such a catalogue should be the means of saving considerable sums of money to the constituent libraries through rationalized book-buying.

In entering into any system of interlending as outlined above, it is always understood that each library may decline to lend certain books on any conditions, or may lend with stipulations as to packing, insurance, reference conditions, &c. The borrowing library is always responsible to the library which lends the volume.

The proper use of the Union Catalogue in the control of the district bureau would make practically the whole book-stock of the district available to any serious reader, and would thus serve the double purpose of meeting the reader’s needs and properly employing books which otherwise would be hidden away in the stacks quite out of reach. Whether this “student” section should be attached to the district libraries or to the central lending library is a matter for consideration.

The books usually called for under this service may be divided into three classes:—

- (a) Books dealing with recognized subjects of study in a manner useful to the student:
- (b) Works of a recognized standard in English literature, including works by contemporary writers:
- (c) Books of a specialized character and expensive and out-of-print books.

In English practice classes (a) and (b) are kept by the county (or district) and class (c) by the central library. New Zealand should be guided by the size of the district and by financial considerations in deciding what part of this student service, which is individual and mainly postal, shall be entrusted to the districts and what to the central lending library.

THE CONTROLLING AUTHORITY.

In the absence of a new statutory authority to control the district library systems, no real difficulty need be anticipated in providing satisfactorily for all the interests concerned. Where the district library bureau is housed in a strong municipal library whose librarian