

## THE NEW ZEALAND PROBLEM.

In New Zealand the cities and some of the larger towns partially pay for their libraries out of the rates. The balance is derived from subscriptions, a method of raising revenue which is almost universally condemned abroad. A considerable extension of rating powers will be necessary to enable the municipal libraries of New Zealand to be fully rate-supported and free to readers—an aim which the New Zealand Library Association has again affirmed its desire to see achieved. Until this is attained it is out of the question to expect the municipal libraries to play their part either as nuclei or as administrative bureaux for a free lending service for rural readers.

In face of our backwardness as disclosed by these facts it is not easy to see how New Zealand will be able, within a reasonable period of time, to furnish its country and small-town population with an adequate library service unless financial assistance from the State or other new sources is forthcoming to establish it and more liberal rating-powers are provided to maintain it.

So much is required to be done forthwith to bring New Zealand up to the standard of efficiency recognized in library circles in Great Britain, the United States, and other western countries that, even if future finance is assured from rating or any other source, a certain amount of State and other aid to found and equip the system will be essential. In this connection New Zealand can probably rely with confidence upon receiving a due share of the Carnegie Corporation's funds, which have been so liberally and judiciously bestowed upon library service in Great Britain and other British dominions. The Corporation has already interested itself in New Zealand, especially in the improvement of the University libraries and in the education of librarians, and it will probably be willing to assist New Zealand towards a national library service in the same way as it assisted the county libraries in Great Britain—*e.g.*, by grants towards—

- (a) The compilation of Union Catalogues and the cost of the foundation stock of books for the various library districts which may be created;
- (b) The cost of the Union Catalogue and the foundation stock of books for the central lending library;
- (c) The education of librarians; and, possibly
- (d) The provision of a library service for the Maori people.

It is, however, a guiding principle of Carnegie policy not to expend money on undertakings which are not likely to be carried on by popular support when such expenditure ceases. Therefore it is essential to see in good time that the finance necessary to carry on the undertaking is assured.

## LEGISLATION CALLED FOR.

The development of a sound national library service in New Zealand calls first and foremost for an early amendment of the library law. In the first instance, to enable municipalities to free their libraries of the necessity for charging a subscription—*i.e.*, to enable them to make the libraries really free—the present limitation of the power of rating for libraries must be removed. At the same time the law should be amended to extend to counties the power of raising library rates and to empower both boroughs and counties to co-operate in library service, forming such mutual associations as may seem most advantageous. This will make it possible to serve the outlying parts of library districts either through a district bureau, which would be housed in the most central municipal library, or through the municipal library itself assuming the duty as part of its regular activities. It is very desirable that any amendment of the Act should leave it open to a particular district to adopt the special form of co-operation that appears most suitable to its conditions.

## EXPENDITURE TO BE MET.

The success of the district services will depend to a great degree on the efficiency of the established municipal libraries which shall be chosen to administer the district bureaux. Not merely the value of the services of the trained librarian, but other incidental advantages accrue to the district from this association. Rent will be light, if charged at all, and the library will as a matter of course act liberally in making loans from its own stock. But the out-of-pocket expenses of all the services carried out by a district bureau should obviously be defrayed out of special funds raised for the district service. It should be accepted as an axiom that any library undertaking the duties of the district bureau should be indemnified against any special expense resulting therefrom.

The district library would have to meet in the way of initial or capital expense the cost of compiling and housing the Union Catalogue; some part of the cost of providing the initial book-stock; shelving for the books and a work-room; boxes for transport of books, &c.

Any attempt to estimate the cost on the basis of the county systems in England or in California, where the conditions of distribution and the numbers to be catered for are so different, would be unwise. The minimum number of books recommended by the Departmental Committee on Libraries (G.B.) in 1927 is 30 volumes per 100 of population, and the English counties on the whole have attained that goal in about fifteen years. The reading strength of a district in New Zealand is not likely to be fully developed in less than ten years, and it would therefore be injudicious and wasteful to start the scheme with a full stock in proportion to population. A reasonable foundation stock would be 10,000 volumes, of which probably 60 per cent. would be fiction. Special financial provision would have to be made for that.