



Mrs. Doris Metcalf (left), and Miss Mary Parsons, on their arrival in Wellington

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Though the details of a library that promises to be so useful to *The Listener* were interesting to ourselves, we felt that the background of the woman who had been chosen to control it should be more interesting still, and we were right. Miss Parsons has been working in libraries ever since she left college, and because, as she says, "We in America believe in advancing by moving about, and in comparative study," she has seen a good deal of America, and has also had some interesting years in Europe.

#### In Paris in the 'Twenties

After the last war, the U.S. Committee for Devastated France established small libraries in towns that were being rebuilt, and soon a school for librarians became necessary. It began as a summer school for French librarians, but soon it was obvious that it would become an international affair, and during her time as resident director at this school (the Paris Library School), Miss Parsons knew Countess Panin, Minister of Social Justice in Russia before the Revolution, who was, perhaps, the first woman to attain Cabinet rank in a Western Government, and other interesting people who came to study, such as the Keeper of the Western Books of the King of Siam, the National Librarian of Turkey, and librarians from Hungary, Poland, Scandinavia and Greece. There were Jews, too, from Jerusalem, who were quite at home in library collections covering many different languages. The city of Montlucon in France, which had a socialist municipal government, sent its librarian to the school, too. It was not strange for a librarian of many years' experience to enter the full course, Miss Parsons said, because "librarians believe they are studying all their lives anyway."

The 1929 financial crash left the school without funds, but Miss Parsons had the satisfaction of seeing her students take it on their own shoulders, and a good deal of the work was carried on. Meanwhile, Miss Parsons took up some research of her own in medieval manuscripts—Anglo-Saxon charters up to the time of King Alfred. Then in 1932, McGill University (Montreal), invited her to give a course in library science—virtually a bi-lingual course, because there were many French Canadians who could not work in English.

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After that, Miss Parsons worked in various universities, and at Michigan she met New Zealanders who went to study library science.

"There's a big, framed picture of New Zealand mountains in the library at Michigan now that was presented by New Zealanders," she said. "I'd made up my mind long ago that I'd take the first opportunity that arose of coming to this country and—well, here I am!"

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