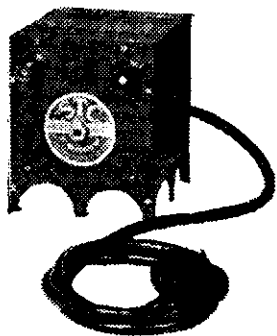


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BOOKS

KNOWLEDGE FOR EXPORT

Britain Regards Publishing As Being Very Important

WALTER G. HARRAP, a director of the publishing firm of George G. Harrap Ltd., and a former president of the Publishers' Association of Great Britain, arrived in New Zealand the other day with two objectives (in his own words): "As an observer, to examine conditions in the book trade here; and to attend the conference of the Associated Booksellers of New Zealand in Wellington." He also had another aim—to say forthrightly what he thinks of New Zealand's three per cent tax (or "primage") on imported books, and the system of limited import quotas. In an interview with *The Listener*, which was a kind of preview of the addresses he gave at the conference the following day, Mr. Harrap spoke his mind about the tax, and then talked of the prospects for the return to normal conditions of British publishing, of new trends in reading taste, of the English book-buying public's feelings about the sacrifices it is making for the sake of export, and the growing official recognition in the British Commonwealth of the importance of trade in books.

We saw Mr. Harrap in his hotel. He took off his coat and sat on the bed, and began to say just what he thought about New Zealand's three per cent primage on imported books:

"A Tax on Knowledge"

"Call it primage or any other name you like, it's still a tax on knowledge. It's more like five per cent by the time it reaches the buyer. And you also have a quota system which restricts the importation of books and tends to make a bookseller concentrate on the quick-selling stuff. New Zealand is the country that was noted for having the highest consumption of reading matter in the British Commonwealth, and yet it also has the distinction of being the only one to put a tax on the importation of books from its sister nations."

"Governments in the Empire generally have not readily recognised the importance of the book in the modern world. But look at other countries. One of the first things the Nazis did was to burn the books they didn't want the German youth to see. Russia's publishing is entirely State controlled, and the Soviet goes to great lengths to circulate its own books outside the U.S.S.R., and I think it would be very difficult indeed to get any books not produced under their control into the country. In China, books are produced in enormous quantities and very cheaply. America, with its quick perception of realities, has seen the value of books, and is eager to send them out through normal trade channels so as to make other people familiar with America."

Books as Ambassadors

"Is the export of books officially looked on as a very important part of Britain's drive for export markets now?"

"Yes, it is now. Not for its magnitude, but for its effect. The financial value of Britain's book exports would probably not give them a high priority. But their potential value does. Yet the British Commonwealth Governments have been slow to recognise the need for this—or rather to act as if they recognised it. In the past we have succeeded in persuading individuals of the importance of keeping men in the printing and bookbinding trades so as not to lose the export market, but we couldn't persuade Governments as a whole. We could not retain enough labour, and recognition came too late. Even now, there is no priority for the release of special workers from the forces—demobilisation is being done on the points system, and so there are not enough men back at work to start building up the trade quickly. The demand vastly exceeds the manufacturing potentiality."

"Actually, the trade can blame itself to some extent. We were all dumb. Book sales fell right off when the war began, and they didn't start to revive again until 1942. And we didn't see that a revival was inevitable. Employers let men go, and were rather glad to be free of responsibility for them when they didn't have enough work for them to do. Then the recovery came on with a rush, the works were all swamped, and they're still swamped."

"Some publishers will be able to get back to normal more quickly than others. Oxford, for instance, have their own wonderful press, which was kept intact and used by the Government through the



WALTER G. HARRAP
"We were all dumb"

war for security printing. I gather from people in the trade here that the Oxford University Press has led them to expect normal conditions within about 18 months. That doesn't go for the whole publishing trade. Other publishers will take longer to get back into full production."

Does the Englishman Mind?

"Do you think the British book-buying public resents being unable to buy what it wants? When a Londoner wants to buy a new book and can't get it, and knows the same book is probably easy to get in Australia or New Zealand, does he make a fuss?"

"No, I don't think there's any resentment at all. We've all been made fully conscious of the absolute necessity of giving up the things we make ourselves, and want to buy ourselves, for

(continued on next page)

It Happened To Me

ENGLISH AS SHE IS SPOKE

THAT sentence often caught the eye of the traveller in France, 60 years ago—it was placed in the shop windows in the villages to encourage the foreign passer-by to enter and not to be misunderstood, though I had great difficulty in persuading one damsel that I wanted, not a pair of elastic-sided boots, but a pair of shoelaces.

I think soon interpreters will be wanted here, if our educationists do not pay more attention to the vowel sounds. I was standing in a small mixed store the other day, marvelling at the price of everything when a good-looking bright boy of about twelve years' went up to the assistant and said,

"Have you any toys?"

"Yes," she replied, "What age?"

"A toy for father," was the reply, and I thought poor father must be an imbecile, but the boy looks all right.

The assistant meantime looking very surprised began taking down mechanical toys, but the boy said, "I want a neck toy."

Then it dawned on her—but not on me—and much embarrassed she said as she put a box of ties in front of him, "I'm sorry. I thought you said a toy."

"So I did," he answered, "I said a neck toy!"

—L. A. Inman.