

# SALVAGING BOOKS

IT has been estimated that, outside of Russia, about 50,000,000 books, in addition to manuscripts — many of which were priceless and irreplaceable—were destroyed in Europe as a result of war.

Britain suffered particularly under the blitz. The official estimate is that 20,000,000 volumes were lost, 6,000,000 in one fire raid on London alone. Liverpool, Southampton, Plymouth and Coventry were among 51 towns and cities whose libraries were seriously damaged by enemy action.

In the Far East, the Japanese invaders followed a similar policy of cultural destruction. Millions of books were destroyed at the National Library in Peiping—taken over as a barracks.

From this world-wide depletion an idea was born which is helping to re-stock the blitzed and ransacked libraries of Europe and the Far East. Already 2,000,000 books, periodicals and manuscripts in 40 different languages, including many rare volumes, are being distributed to libraries where they are most needed for the cultural resurrection of Europe. There is a particular scarcity of modern technical, scientific, commercial and legal works—the "working tools" of many professional men.

## Thirty-eight Miles of Shelves

It was in 1941, during Britain's national salvage campaign, that librarians throughout the country complained that many valuable volumes were being collected for pulping. A committee representing the Ministry of Supply, the Library Association, the Association of Special Libraries and the publishing trade, decided to launch a book recovery drive within the national salvage campaign.

More than a thousand Local Authorities co-operated in the scheme, with help from voluntary organisations. Throughout the country collections were organised and receiving stations set up where books could be sorted by librarians and voluntary workers. From the millions of books left at Post Offices for the Forces, 91,000 volumes were extracted as being of more value to libraries.

At the end of 1943, under the auspices of the Conference of Allied Ministers of Education, the Inter-Allied Book Centre was established in an old newspaper building requisitioned by the Government in London's Salisbury Square. It is here that the 2,000,000 books and periodicals so far reclaimed from the salvage campaign are systematically classified by a team of eight librarians, clerical staff, and porters, working under the direction of B. M. Headicar, for many years librarian at the London School of Economics and now, at 72, a bibliographer of 60 years' experience. The Centre's 38 miles of shelving are rapidly filling, increased weekly by about 30,000 volumes from all parts of the country.

The response to the appeal for books to re-stock the libraries of Europe has been surprisingly generous. More than 150,000 books and periodicals came from the shelves of private book-lovers alone. Many gave valuable collections—the acquisitions of a lifetime of scholarship. A great number also came from industrial firms and organisations, who have given

important works on technical subjects and long sets of valuable scientific and technical periodicals.

## Rare Finds

Cathedral, college and university libraries have made notable contributions. From one northern university came 13½ tons of books, the accumulation of 25 years—too valuable to destroy but too numerous to accommodate. From a basement cellar of another university came an important collection of astronomical works which had been stored for half-a-century without being catalogued.

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