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## THE WORLD WANTS MORE BOOKS

Problems Facing British Publishers

VERYBODY in New Zealand who is interest. books has some knowledge of the abnormal state of the book world, especially in Britain, where most of our supplies come from. We know what it is not to be able to get books we want. To say that production troubles at one end, and restrictions at this, account for the shortage, is a brief summary of a situation that has many aspects, economic and cultural. Hearing that G. Wren Howard, a director of the English publishing firm of Jonathan Cape, was visit-ing New Zealand, The Listener looked him up and asked him if he would throw some light on publishers' problems, the demand for books, authors' prospects, and the relation between book production and British influence abroad.

### More Reading Than Ever

It was an encouraging story Mr. Wren Howard had to tell about the demand for books. There is more reading than ever before, not only in Britain, but all over the world. People are apt to think of books solely or largely in terms of novels, but there is a greatly increased demand for other books, including technical works. The public is beginning to learn how to use books, to realise that the answer to everything, so far as is known, may be found in book. The increasing attention given to education, including the raising of the school age, is a factor. Mention of the new Education Act in Britain drew from Mr. Howard the information that every school is to have a library. It is actually provided that the library shall be of certain dimensions, so many cubic feet per child. This will take time, but it will be done.

At present there is a shortage of school books, and of every other kind of book. This is caused by three things. Shortage of paper, shortage of labour, and import restrictions. "During the war," said Mr. Howard, "we were restricted in paper to 371/2 per cent, of our paper consumption in 1939. Now we are up to 80 per cent. But we can't get sufficient labour. In a printing and binding works the staff may be 50 per cent, men and 50 per cent, women. If there are not enough in one category it holds up the work of the other. Then there are restrictions on the import of books, and this is especially serious with respect to America. We usually get a lot of books from America, including many technical

"We are asked to export all we can. Before the war, Britain sent abroad £3,000,000 worth of books; during the war this rose to £5,000,000; and last year, 1946-47, it was just on £8,000,000. We have been told to increase this to £12,000,000 as part of the national export drive. We are doing our best, but we have to contend with import restrictions in other countries, including New Zealand.

#### British Books Abroad

"British books abroad? Yes, there is a great demand for them. I have visited Scandinavia and Finland, and I was much impressed by the interest in English books and the English language. I had an audience of 600 people at a lecture in Oslo, just because I talked English. These countries want to learn about England. There and in the Low Countries, English is becoming the 'second language' of the people."

Some of the publishers lost heavily in the blitzes. Large stocks of standard works were destroyed, and it has been

(continued on next page)





JOAN TAYLOR (left) and RACHEL WHEELER, assistants to Jean Combs, Officer-in-charge of Broadcasts to Schools for the NZBS. Miss Taylor writes the senior literature series "Tales That Are Told," and Miss Wheeler is responsible for "Story Time" for the juniors