

# LIBRARY'S NEED In Technical Section VALUE GREAT

THE potential value of an up-to-date technical section in the Adelaide Public Library was stressed today by the acting librarian (Mr. H. J. Keyes). Mr. Keyes agreed with remarks made by Mr. Ralph Munn, the representative of the Carnegie Corporation, making a survey of Australian libraries, who yesterday said that the lack of up-to-date technical works was the main fault of the library.

"This particular section of the library is out of date," Mr. Keyes said. "The reason is that we have had no funds to buy books needed. All the other sections of the library are of a permanent nature, although each section should be augmented from time to time."

At the present time, when so many were unemployed and searching for some means of getting work, he went on, the technical section of the public library in a city was of wonderful value. Here in Adelaide he had had brought under his notice a case in which the library had helped to start a new industry.

## HOW COMPANY BENEFITED

As the result of references placed at their disposal by library attendants, a local company had been able to begin the manufacture of chromium plating here. That, said Mr. Keyes, was just one example of the value of a technical section.

The New South Wales Public Library had achieved wonderful success with its special technological section, which was maintained by special grant, and had a research staff. It had been proved to be of great assistance to New South Wales manufacturers.

Such a section could not be established on as ambitious lines in Adelaide, Mr. Keyes said, but he thought that a more modified form could be placed in operation.

The library was wholly dependent on the grant of the Government, he pointed out, and thus had its hands tied, insofar as any extension or increase of staff was concerned.

# FREE LENDING LIBRARY American Authority's Proposal BETTER FACILITIES FOR ADELAIDE Municipal Rate

A free municipal lending library, controlled by a board with power to strike a rate to establish and maintain it, was suggested in an interview yesterday by Mr. R. Munn, of the Carnegie Corporation, who is making a survey of library facilities in Australia.

Mr. Munn severely criticised the present lending library as inadequate for the cultural and educational needs of a city the size of Adelaide. His proposal, which, it is understood, will be amplified in his report to the Carnegie Corporation on his return to New York, was that a rate-supported lending library should be established in the city, with branches in the suburbs. A library district should be created in the metropolitan area, and the governing board given authority by legislation to declare a uniform rate throughout the district under its control.

"The Adelaide Circulating Library," Mr. Munn said, "is not a proper library at all, but simply a place where books, chiefly novels, are distributed to subscribers. About 70 per cent. of the books are fiction, and of the remainder a large proportion consists of books so out of date as to be of but little use. Biography and history are the only non-fiction sections which approach reasonable adequacy. Those sections dealing with science, technology, and the arts are so old as to be of value only as showing the history of these subjects. In addition, the method of classification among the non-fictionary sections—if it can be called a method—is such as to make serious use of the collection extremely difficult.

## 90 Per Cent. Novels

"Although exact records are not kept, the librarian estimates that 90 per cent. of the books lent to subscribers are novels," Mr. Munn said. "This criticism, while directed at the Adelaide Circulating Library, is equally true of similar institutions in the other large cities of Australia which I have so far visited. Under present conditions, a circulating library, institute or any similar organisations must be run on lines which are almost entirely commercial. The only income which it receives comes from membership dues, and the easiest and cheapest way of attracting subscribers is to offer them the largest possible number of the cheaper novels. Such libraries have very little value in the educational and cultural life of a community, and it is difficult to discover any way in which they are better than those of the commercial libraries run by booksellers. In the small towns and rural areas institutes and similar libraries are the only types which are at present possible. But a large city such as Adelaide should have a rate-supported municipal lending library, which would be free to all residents, and which would be operated along the lines of those which have proved so successful in Great Britain, Canada, and the United States.

"This municipal library would have a central building in the business district of the city, with branches in the suburbs. The lack of unified municipal government throughout the metropolitan area of Adelaide represents an obstacle, but it could be removed by legislation, by means of which a library district, comprising the metropolitan area, would be formed. The governing board of this municipal lending library would have to be carefully selected. It would represent all interests and would have power to strike a uniform library rate throughout the whole area under its control. The board would be constituted in some such way as the Tramways Board and be given somewhat similar jurisdiction.

"The Adelaide Circulating Library and the various suburban institutes claim a circulation of only 1,500,000 volumes a year. In cities the size of Adelaide in Britain and the United States, where there are rate-supported free municipal libraries, the average is from two to three times this volume and contains moreover, a creditable percentage of more serious books of a non-fictionary character."

## Praise For Country Institutes

Mr. Munn, accompanied by Mr. Pitt, chief librarian of the Public Library of Victoria, who is assisting him in his survey, yesterday visited 10 country institutes within a radius of 50 miles of Adelaide. Mr. Munn said that he had been most favorably impressed by the manner in which, in spite of the difficulties with which they had had to contend, they were performing their work. "They are poor and struggling," he added, "and not giving the best type of library service, but considering the extreme sparsity of population in the country districts and the small number of inhabitants in many of the towns and villages, the institutes are being developed as well as might reasonably be expected.

"The Association of Institutes is doing a splendid work in South Australia in providing these small country institutes with a system under which they can rent books from the association instead of having to buy them outright. The association is also doing excellent work in providing these institutes with boxes of general literature. In every case the best books in the institutes we visited were those which have been furnished by the association. This association is the only one existing in Australia. In the other States country institutes operate independently without centralised buying or any type of co-operation."

Mr. Munn said that he had also been impressed with the Adelaide Children's Library. "It is," he said, "a splendid example of the best type of children's library. It is unfortunate, however, that it is available only for reading within the building. To be really effective it should be a lending library. If a municipal lending library is established in Adelaide, the children's library might be made an extremely interesting and useful part of it."

This morning Mr. Munn and Mr. Pitt will leave for Perth, where they will complete their survey.

# The Advertiser

ADELAIDE: MONDAY,  
JULY 23, 1934

## OUR LIBRARY SYSTEM

Though what I dream, and what I do,  
In prayer's despite, are oft-times Two.

The Public Library of South Australia might well echo the song of that fine but forgotten poetess, E. Nesbit, if the latest report on its activities can be accepted. It is well managed. It is "making the best possible use of the small resources at its disposal." But this is only sugar-coating to the pill administered by Mr. Ralph Munn, of the Carnegie Institute, an expert who has lately made a hasty survey of all libraries in Australia readily accessible. Our Public Library, he finds, is out of date in its technical section—a department in which, obviously, almost any volume can soon become antiquated and rather worse than useless. This failure to keep up with the continuous advance of science is due to lack of funds. Again, there is a serious shortage of staff, making it impossible to give the enquirer that full assistance which shall make his search effectual. And, finally, there is hardly accommodation enough for the staff that exists. All of which may be briefly summed up thus:—Our Library is staffed and stocked with the best of intentions, but it has not either the books or the space, the money, or the men.

Mr. Munn, who has been escorted round Australia by Mr. Pitt, chief librarian in Melbourne, is in a position to contrast our activities with those of the other States, as well as of his own country. He was struck by the quite different methods worked out by independent bodies who have identical aims. Sydney and Melbourne, for instance, pride themselves on being for the State rather than the City, and will not only lend almost any book to any person, but will send it far up-country on request. Adelaide firmly refuses to let its volumes go out, claiming that the gain to one reader of a borrowed book would be much more than balanced by the loss to others, in the absence of that book from the library. The Institutes' Association has stepped in on behalf of the country dwellers, establishing a more modest reference library from which any institute—and there are more than 300 in the State—can requisition an authoritative volume on any subject in which a subscriber may be interested. This association is about our only body for which the visiting expert has nothing but praise. "The only one existing in Australia," he says, "and doing splendid work;" in the other States, country institutes have little co-operation, and no centralised buying. The Parliamentary library naturally specialises for the benefit of the members using it. The University has, thanks to the munificence of Mr. Barr Smith, "by far the best building of the sort in Australia." The Children's Library is "of the best type," but cramped, like its parent body, by refusal to lend out its books. There remains the Circulating Library, in which our visitor saw, naturally enough, perhaps, just one more subscription affair, differing little from those of the bookseller's shop. Yet Adelaide has a kindly feeling towards it, as the original nucleus of

our whole system. Some half-century back the Public Library sprang from it as a separate body; but for many years before that the plain solid building (without the modern additions at the back) had stood on North terrace as it stands now, but proudly alone in flying the flag of Culture.

Mr. Munn's great all-healing panacea is the Municipal Library. In anything, by whatever name, depending upon subscribers, he has little faith. They will demand novels, he suggests, and must be so supplied if they are to be retained as subscribers at all. He would have a central lending library, with branches in all suburbs. It would be stocked with educational and technical books, and would send them anywhere on requisition. This would require legislation, appointing a Library Board constituted rather like the existing Tramways Trust. And this new body would need "power to strike a uniform library rate throughout the whole area under its control." Advantages and difficulties are both obvious. The thing is done almost everywhere in Britain, and the United States, and even South Africa. True, municipal librarians will lament, in confidential talk, the discomfort of being ruled by the members of a board elected, perhaps, on political grounds. To such men, spending money on books can seem almost a sin. "Libraries is luxuries!" declared one Canadian mayor; and the librarian, repeating it at a library association gathering in Britain, added his own retort: "I said to him, 'Quite right, Bill; but so is baths; and we mean to have them both!'" In South Australia we have all the machinery—though it is unused and rusty—for complying straightway with Mr. Munn's wishes. The Free Libraries Act, 1898, gives not only to municipal corporations, but to district councils, the power to establish just such institutions as those dear to the heart of Mr. Munn, to borrow money on debentures, and to declare an annual rate to provide further funds. So far as is known, only one country town has ventured even a grant-in-aid to its institute, and that came out of a modestly styled rate for general improvements. For 36 years our well-intended Free Libraries Act has remained on the shelf. Will the eloquence of our American visitor induce either city, suburbs, or country to take it down and dust it?

## TECHNICAL SECTION OF PUBLIC LIBRARY

### Mr. Keyes Supports Mr. Munn

General agreement with the views regarding the Public Library given in an interview in "The Advertiser" yesterday with Mr. R. Munn (Director of the Carnegie Library at Pittsburg, U.S.A.), was expressed by Mr. H. J. Keyes (Acting Public Librarian).

Mr. Keyes said the technical section of the library was one of the weakest, because of lack of funds to purchase the latest books dealing with technical subjects. The section was one of the most popular in the library, because many people who were unemployed were seeking information from books contained in it in order to fit themselves for positions should they become available. A feature of the New South Wales library was its technological section, which was maintained by a special grant of about £2,000 a year.

Mr. Keyes said that while such a scheme would be too ambitious for Adelaide, some modified scheme might be possible.

Yesterday, Messrs. Munn and Pitt (chief librarian of the Melbourne Library) attended a meeting of the Institutes' Association of South Australia and discussed with members the work of country libraries.

## CRITICISM OF LIBRARY RESENTED

Discourteous, Unfounded,  
Says Official Reply

### TEN-MINUTE VISIT

Public "Satisfactorily Catered For"

A reply to the criticism by Mr. R. Munn, of the Carnegie Corporation, of the Adelaide Circulating Library was made yesterday by the chairman of the committee of the Circulating Library (Mr. F. G. Davidson).

"The circulating library is not looking for a Carnegie grant," said Mr. Davidson, "and, after filling in and returning to him a very lengthy questionnaire, I consider Mr. Munn's fleeting visit and unfounded criticism most discourteous."

Mr. Davidson said that Mr. Munn and another man had paid a ten-minute visit to the library in the absence of the secretary and librarian (Mr. F. W. Bampfild) and himself. No officials were consulted. Long before this visit Mr. Davidson received a long questionnaire from Mr. Munn, the filling in of which involved much work. This, however, was done as an act of courtesy, and the questionnaire was returned to Mr. Munn.

#### Rate Increase Of 3d.

With regard to Mr. Munn's opinion that Adelaide should have a free lending library, Mr. Davidson said that it was estimated that to install such an institution for the metropolitan area would cost the city an increase of at least threepence in the rate. City rate-payers were already overburdened, and there was no reason why they should pay additional rates for the benefit of people in the suburbs.

"We quite admit that the biggest proportion of the books are novels," continued Mr. Davidson, "but we also claim to have a most up-to-date collection of history, biography, and travel books. The library does not pretend to cater for the small demand for scientific and technical books. At one time the library did, to some extent, attempt to meet this demand, but this class of book is very expensive and soon becomes out of date. In our opinion, the public is satisfactorily catered for in this class of literature by the Public Library and by the Yorkgate Library, a small section housed in the Institute building."

The Circulating Library had to depend entirely on subscriptions for revenue, continued Mr. Davidson. It had no Government grant such as the institutes received. Its subscription was less than one penny a day, and for that small amount it made available the very best English literature as well as the lighter class of fiction. Included in the selection was the choice of hundreds of magazines.

#### 10,000 New Books A Year

"The committee's endeavor has always been to keep the library up to date," said Mr. Davidson, "and in proof of this we can state that we add at least 10,000 new books every year. A large majority of the general public reads for recreation, and we claim to give it this form of amusement and enjoyment to the best of our ability."

With regard to Mr. Munn's criticism concerning the classification of books, Mr. Davidson maintained that the circulating library possessed a most up-to-date and complete card index in which books were indexed not only under the authors' names, but also under the titles. Had Mr. Munn asked to be shown this index, he would have realised that the system was quite satisfactory for subscribers' use.

Mr. Munn had praised the service given by country institutes, said Mr. Davidson. In that regard he was probably unaware that thousands of books were sold every year by the Circulating Library at a nominal rate to country institutes. In that way the library disposed of surplus books, and not only materially helped the country institutes, but also made room for the addition of new books.