

# Critical Survey of S.A. Libraries

## MANY FEATURES DISLIKED IN EXPERTS' REPORT

### Circulating And University Methods Attacked Need for Free Public Lending Library

Severe but constructive criticism is made of South Australian libraries in a comprehensive report prepared by the director of the Carnegie Library of Pittsburg (Mr. Ralph Munn) and the chief librarian of the Public Library of Victoria (Mr. E. R. Pitt).

The report, which was compiled after a survey of Australian libraries they conducted on behalf of the Australian Council for Educational Research, was released today.

The report emphasises the need for a free public lending library in South Australia, and indicates how the reduced Government grant has seriously injured the service of the Public Library.

According to Messrs. Munn and Pitt, the Adelaide Children's Library has the best collection of books in Australia, and the Institutes Association of South Australia is the most highly organised and fully developed library association in Australia.

The Adelaide Circulating Library adds little to the educational and cultural life of the city, says the report, which attacks the Adelaide University authorities for appointing an inexperienced librarian to the Barr Smith Library.

Summaries of the reports on South Australian libraries are—

**Adelaide Public Library.**—The want of a sufficient number of recent books is shown by a survey of the shelves. The recent additions are quite inadequate for the needs of an ever-increasing circle of readers. The result of the reduction in Government subsidies is shown in a lack of modern books, especially in the technical section. The management is in the hands of a competent chief librarian and staff, and every service possible, with such limited resources, is given. The money spent last year on books, £243, is quite

inadequate. The staff should be enlarged, so that it can do more research work.

It is greatly to be regretted that the trustees have been unable to maintain a country lending section, and there is a tendency to restrict the librarian and his staff in the selection of books.

**Adelaide circulating Library.**—The stock comprises 53,000 volumes, of which 70 per cent. is fiction. The non-fiction includes a large amount of material which is hopelessly out of date. Like institutes in other large cities, it adds little to the educational and cultural life of the city.

Their dependence upon subscription fees makes it necessary that the library attract the largest possible number of readers of fiction. Excess in travel and biography, the bulk of its non-fiction collection is neither extensive nor modern. Science, technology, and the arts are represented by collections which are archaic.

The library is greatly overcrowded, and technical processes are poor. The system—if such it can be called—of classification places a book on England in Shakespeare's time, between volumes on modern Germany and Russia.

It is difficult to determine that it is of any more value to the community than the strictly commercial libraries which are operated by booksellers. The validity of its claim to Government housing is questionable.

### Criticism of Suburban Libraries

**Adelaide Suburban Libraries.**—Unley and Port Adelaide libraries are the only two with paid staffs. Unley is the only suburban whose resources are in any way adequate to fill the needs of its district for general reading. It has very little to offer to a student or other serious reader, and the juvenile section is only fair. Unley is another example of the suburban institute which is not able to progress against the counter-attraction of a big city and the competition of bookellers and bookshops.

What has been said of Unley is true

to an even greater extent of the Port Adelaide library. Its resources are small, and its support is becoming less certain each year. Goodwood and Parkside have had such serious difficulties that their municipal councils have had to extend financial aid. Clarence Park is so new and small that it is hardly fair to judge it.

The suburban institutes of Adelaide, poor as they are, are several degrees superior to those of Sydney. The Adelaide University Library—the best collection of books in the city—an attempt has been made to keep it well rounded. Technical processes are deficient. The librarian appears to have little discretionary power, but in view of the inexperience of the present librarian this attitude may not now be subject to criticism.

The University library staff salaries are disgracefully low, £240 being the normal maximum for librarians of long experience who are doing important cataloguing and reference work.

The University administration recently exhibited a complete lack of appreciation of the importance of trained and skilled library personnel by appointing as chief librarian a young lecturer who has though scholarly and personable, is wholly without library experience. At present he is learning library technique from his own staff.

## MIXED RECEPTION GIVEN TO LIBRARIES REPORT

### Allegation That Experts Made Hurried Surveys

#### “VALUABLE IDEAS”—SIR W. SOWDEN

Great interest has been aroused in South Australia by the comprehensive report of the director of the Carnegie Library of Pittsburg (Mr. Munn) and the Chief Librarian of the Public Library of Victoria (Mr. E. R. Pitt) of Australian libraries. While it was received with mixed feelings it was generally admitted today that the suggestions contained in the report are helpful. They will be thoroughly considered whenever Adelaide organisations meet soon.

"I cannot understand how Messrs. Munn and Pitt obtained the information necessary to criticise the Adelaide Circulating Library, as they spent only 10 minutes in the library and saw no officials," the chairman of the Adelaide Circulating Library committee (Mr. Davidson) said today.

"I can only surmise that the information was supplied from an outside source," added Mr. Davidson. The report stated that the Adelaide Circulating Library, whose collection comprised 90 per cent. fiction, gave little aid to the culture and education of the city.

Mr. Davidson said that the library aimed at giving subscribers the best value for their fees. There is an excellent collection of history, travel, and biography books in the library,

but the section was used by only a small proportion of subscribers.

"If people require a heavy class of reading material they have the Public Library at their disposal," said Mr. Davidson.

"The report is full of valuable suggestions," the president of the S.A. Institutes Association (Sir William Sowden) said today.

"The comment upon the work of the association in this State is naturally gratifying to the conductors, as he says it is the most effective in the Commonwealth. But because of the necessarily short time at the disposal of Messrs. Munn and Pitt the full benefit of the association are hardly received."

Sir William added that a great deal was done for the country institutes for which subscribers paid nothing directly.

### Suburban Comment Hostile

The lack of volumes suitable for students in suburban libraries was criticised in the report. It was stated today that although finances had been depleted in recent years every effort was made to cater for all tastes of readers at these centres.

The Town Clerk of Unley (Mr. J. B. Miller) said that the Unley City Council was trustee for the Parkside and Eastwood, Goodwood, and Clarence Park Institutes. Several thousands of pounds had been spent by the council on these libraries, and money had been lent for upkeep expenses.

The Unley Institute was not controlled by the council. It was, however, progressive and well managed.

"In my opinion suburban lending libraries which make a small charge for exchanging books are doing much harm to other libraries," he said. Often the class of book lent in that way was not of such a high tone as that which could be secured from the institutes.

The secretary of the Port Adelaide Institute (Mr. G. D. Hollidge) agreed with Mr. Miller that the class of literature in the lending libraries was generally of a lower standard than that in the institute libraries.

Until about four years ago the institute was in a satisfactory position, and funds permitted the purchase of more technical volumes than at present. This

was due largely to the financial assistance given by the Government. However, since then the subsidy had been curtailed by about £750—a cut of approximately 80 per cent.

It was realised that the greatest demand was for fiction, but the committee endeavored to cater for the few who preferred technical or general volumes by increasing supplies of these periodically.

The Mayor of Port Adelaide (Mr. H. W. Bray) expressed indignation at the criticism levelled at the local institute.

"I have no time for gentlemen who rush through our country and then criticise what they see. Those gentlemen criticised our Port Adelaide Library without knowing anything of the conditions prevailing at the Port," said Mr. Bray.

"I have no hesitation in saying that the Port Institute is doing remarkably well when it is considered what a small amount of revenue is received," he said.



Mr. Bray