Introduction

WILFRED J. PLUMBE

The articles in this number of Library Trends have been written in seven countries; they deal with all kinds of libraries in territories that girdle the earth. Six of the contributors are practicing librarians engaged in the day-to-day struggle to consolidate libraries and librarianship in newly developing countries; they—or perhaps it should be written “we”—are therefore biased, partisan, and emotionally committed. The other five contributors have intimate knowledge of the areas concerned but they write from the Olympian heights of the Library of Congress, the Library Association, the University of London and the University of Illinois, and they are consequently more objective, impartial, and apodictic. Only by first providing surveys of library activity from librarians personally involved “on the spot,” assembling information which has not been juxtaposed or reviewed elsewhere, and then considering certain topics of primary importance to all newly developing territories, has it been possible to discern and identify the trends in development that exist.

The terms “underdeveloped” or, more politely, “newly developing,” are often applied to countries in which the per capita income is less than $250 (or some lower figure) a year. Personal incomes were not used as the basis for the present survey, but a more general scope was adopted, paying special attention to territories which are “newly developing” in the political sense.

Much of this number is concerned with libraries in the tropics; it could, in fact, form the starting-point for a future “Handbook of Tropical Librarianship.” Today, libraries exist under the coconut palms of tiny West Indian islands, in stilt villages far up the rivers of Thailand, in oil exploration camps under the Arabian sun, at oases in the Sahara desert, as well as in territories such as India which have a long tradition of libraries. In newly developing tropical countries (excluding schools) there are already not less than 75,000 library service

Mr. Plumbe is Librarian, University of Malaya, Kuala Lumpur, Malaya.

[125]
points. A special publication devoted to tropical librarianship is a major need and becomes—especially to library schools in tropical areas—daily more desirable.

Rapid growth of library services in newly developing territories has resulted from increasing awareness within the countries concerned of the necessity for libraries, and has been fostered from outside by international organizations and other agencies. In countries such as Indonesia, Ghana, and Israel, where there have been strong nationalist movements, the impetus has come from within; libraries have come to be regarded as the spearhead of new social forces attacking lethargy, ignorance, and poverty; it has been recognized that economic advance stems from books just as certainly as it stems from electric power stations. In other countries, such as French West Africa, Northern Nigeria, the East Africa High Commission Territories, the Netherlands Antilles, and the British West Indies, libraries have resulted from the mildly beneficial administration of colonial powers.

Everywhere, the most potent factor leading to the establishment of libraries has been economic compulsion: the need for two stalks of rice instead of one; the need for educated citizens. The Soviet Central Asian Republics have long realized this. India, Japan, Egypt, Argentina, Cuba, Singapore, the Eastern Region of Nigeria, Turkey, Panama, and many other countries, are now trying to catch up. The masses of Asia, Africa, the Middle East, and Latin America may not yet realize how libraries can change their lives but there is increasing awareness by educationists, politicians, scientists, and all species of administrators, that library services in academic institutions, schools, research organizations, and to the community at large, are fundamental to most other activities and provide the basis for beneficial change. This increasing acceptance of “the library idea” in newly developing territories is the most important general trend that may be discerned.

Much credit for helping to create this attitude towards libraries must go to Unesco. As one of the contributors in this issue remarks: “Of course, people cannot appreciate what they have never had the opportunity of appreciating, but once a book service is offered there is abundant evidence that it will be used.” Unesco has been influential in establishing libraries of all kinds but it is the public library pilot projects at Delhi, Medellin, and Enugu, that have demonstrated most dramatically the latent need for books and acted as revelations in the countries concerned. Equally important is Unesco’s work in organizing
the production of books in vernacular language in heavily populated
South Asia.

Growing help from “outside” constitutes a clear trend in develop-
ment. The United States Information Service and British Council li-
braries, although small and limited in scope, have greatly exceeded
their ambassadorial and propagandist functions, and appreciation of
them is worldwide. The Inter-University Council for Higher Educa-
tion Overseas, operating from a London office, gives advice, recruits
librarians, and has established a photocopying service second to none,
for universities and university colleges in territories under its aegis.
Various technical aid programs, assistance generously given by the
Carnegie Corporation of New York, the Ford Foundation, the Asia
Foundation and other philanthropic organizations, the cooperation
of the American Library Association, the Library of Congress,
the Library Association, of agencies such as the United States
Book Exchange and the British National Book Centre, and help from
individual libraries, have all been vital. To many librarians at work
in newly developing territories, it seems important at the present time
to establish high standards in selected libraries and convince author-
ities locally responsible for funds that they are receiving a first-class
return for money invested in them; it is felt that strong official support
should then be forthcoming for all libraries. But in the heart of Africa,
Asia, Latin America, and the Middle East, where enlightened public
administration may not be taken for granted, it is still most difficult,
sometimes, to establish adequate standards of book provision, library
buildings, staffing, and personal service: and it is here that advice and
solid financial aid from “outside” have been, and in future can be,
invaluable.

Unesco and other agencies have temporarily made available to
newly developing countries the services of librarians with experience
in other parts of the world. Surveys of library conditions, and analyses
of needs, have been made by these librarians and other visiting ex-
erts. Eventually it will be necessary for newly developing territories
to become independent of personnel from other countries. Tens of
thousands of librarians are required and they will be produced not in
the United States or the United Kingdom but in new schools of librar-
ianship in India and South America, in Ankara, Kharkhov, Jerusalem,
Cairo, Ibadan, Port-of-Spain, Djakarta, and Manila. Again, it is im-
portant that high standards should be achieved. Library education
must be based on a wide subject background. Whether this back-
ground can best be acquired by reading for a degree in a relatively narrow field, or by acquiring superficial knowledge of more subjects as a result of practical experience in a general library, is a matter that is best approached without dogmatism; answers must depend upon the educational systems and intellectual standards that prevail in individual countries. One point that sometimes needs to be stated in newly developing territories where degrees in library science are not granted is that librarianship is now a complex study the academic content of which is equal to that of a reputable degree course. Whereas in the past librarians were often scholars in subjects other than librarianship, it is now possible for some of them to be regarded as scholars in the field of librarianship.

Some of the finest major libraries built in the past fifteen years have been erected in Algiers, Dakar, Accra, Legon, Ibadan, Enugu, Kampala, Salisbury, Pretoria, Rehovoth, Peradeniya, Rangoon, Singapore, Hosei, Manila, Mexico City, Rio Piedras, Kingston, Medellin, Bello, Sao Paulo, Caracas—and this list is by no means complete. To design buildings with strict regard to function, climate, local insect pests, and with proper cooperation between architect and librarian, is now not so much a recognizable trend as normal practice. Modern concrete technology has given a certain international style to library architecture but there is more difference and contrast than one might expect.

Many millions of books continue to be housed in premises that were not designed, or intended, as libraries; in them, if protective measures are not taken, the books are certain to deteriorate as a result of the action of insects, micro-fungi (moulds), or dust. Relatively few libraries elsewhere are afflicted by dust as librarians know it in the Middle East countries, the Sudan, Northern Nigeria, and parts of India, but in many countries insects are enemies and micro-fungi a "fifth-column" which can be shown no mercy. The trend is to air-condition libraries and to abandon old, messy, and dangerous ways of insect and fungi control when they can be replaced by treatment with modern chemical compounds.

Librarians in the West sometimes forget that the languages of Europe are not universally used. In some newly developing countries there is a strong and understandable feeling that literature of all kinds should be made available in local languages. Book production in vernacular languages, however, has not kept pace with world growth in literacy even although much publishing of a fundamental nature has been achieved by government literature bureaus, commercial firms,
Christian missions, international organizations, and other bodies. Until a much greater range of publications in such languages as Arabic, Hausa, Swahili, Nyanja, Chinese, Hindu, Hindustani, Urdu, Gujerati, Cinhalese, Tamil, Indonesian, Malay, and Thai, becomes possible, the development of “popular” libraries, in countries which have not adopted a European language as “official,” will be only a pipe-dream. Book shelves will remain empty and readers, especially children, will have to be turned away because there are not enough books available.

Readers of the following pages will quickly realize that libraries of newly developing countries evince almost infinite variety. At one end of the scale is the extraordinary skyscraper municipal library of Sao Paulo, and at the other the few shelves of brown-paper-covered booklets in an unlit thatched mud hut in Chief Kalindawalu’s village in Northern Rhodesia. One thing is heartening. Over most of the world books are going out from central service points to users by every possible means: bookmobile, traveling library, train, bus, mammy-wagon, aeroplane, canoe, river steamer, bibliocart, bicycle—even by camel and on porters’ heads. The human story behind all this effort will never be told, or it will be titrated into statistics. It is a small, not very noticeable, part of the saga in social history through which we are living. It has been epitomized by a tribal African who once remarked to the present writer: “The day of the spear has gone; the day of the book has come.”