



Netherlands

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A SURVEY OF LIBRARY TRAINING in the Netherlands at this point in time is extremely difficult, for it is a period of transition. For some years, work has been proceeding on a completely new system of professional training at both the higher and lower level, and it is expected that by 1964 education for librarianship will have a completely different look from what it presents today.

Under these circumstances there is little point in giving a detailed historical account of library training in the Netherlands. It is necessary, however, to say something about the general library situation, this being the background for a historical outline of the development of library training as it is at the moment. There is a close relationship between the latter, in its origin and growth, and the general organization of libraries.

In general it can be said that some of the characteristics of the Dutch nation find their replica in the organization of the country's libraries. Just as the citizen of the Netherlands considers his independence a privilege to be carefully guarded, so do the libraries—but, as in the case of the individual citizens, the libraries are ready to cooperate, as shown in the system of inter-library loans. The operation of this system of inter-library loans is made possible by a well-developed organization of union catalogs.

This practical co-operation derives from the organization of the librarians of the country. There is, in the first place, the Netherlands Library Association, founded in 1912 and celebrating its fiftieth anniversary last year. Membership in this association is open to all who perform professional duties in any kind of library in the Kingdom of the Netherlands. It gives, therefore, research librarians as well as public librarians and special librarians a chance to meet and discuss their common problems, while at the same time the different groups

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have, within the framework of the general objectives of the Association, their own separate working committees.

The second organization to be mentioned in this respect is the Central Association for Public Libraries. Founded in 1908, it has for its primary objects to promote and to maintain public libraries and to champion, so far as they relate to this, the interests of librarianship and of library science in general. Public libraries in the Netherlands are, with a few exceptions, private bodies founded and maintained by associations or foundations that find in this task their only reason for existence. That is why a central association was necessary in which all public libraries are united and which acts as a semi-official organization between the subsidizing authorities (state, municipality and often the province) and the public libraries. The individualistic nature of the public library system, however, manifests itself in the fact that there are many Roman Catholic and some Protestant public libraries side by side with the classic non-denominational public library. All these public libraries are kept together by the Central Association.

It is no surprise that the initiative for library training was taken by this Association. Since 1922 courses have been organized for a so-called assistant's certificate. They last for two years, during which time the candidate has to work actively in a public library and take courses given for candidates from different parts of the country in a number of training libraries. The curriculum includes orientation on place and function of the public library in the community, the several branches of library science and administration, and a general survey of the arts and sciences and the literature relating to them. Lessons of a practical kind are given at the public libraries where the candidates are working.

One of the requirements for public grants to a public library is that the professional staff must be recruited from among holders of the assistant's certificate. To qualify for an executive post, however, a director's certificate is required. This can only be obtained by a holder of an assistant's certificate who has had at least one year of practice. Training for the director's certificate is given in a ten-months course at The Hague, partly in the Royal Library, partly in the Public Library. In this course, stress is laid on topics in the field of library administration, on the role of the public library in the social structure, on readers' needs, interests, and habits,—in short, the knowledge without which a director cannot well accomplish his task.

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The Central Association for Public Libraries and the Netherlands Library Association have co-operated closely since an agreement was made between them in 1927. The basis of this co-operation is dual membership, which makes it possible for public library officers to be members of both associations on payment of one subscription. Four committees established by the two associations together look after the common interests. The monthly *Bibliotheekleven* is the official journal of both associations. However strange this arrangement may seem, as viewed from the standpoint of organization, it has proved to be practical and successful. Thanks to the many new members from the public library service, after the agreement of 1927, the Netherlands Library Association could record a considerable increase in membership, which was to be repeated during World War II, when another large group came to strengthen the ranks of the Association. Within its framework a section for special, commercial and industrial libraries was started in 1941. As in other countries, the interests of special librarians differed considerably from those of the librarians of research libraries and public libraries, but in contrast to the United States and Great Britain, no separate association was established. This certainly was to the benefit of all librarians, who were members of the Association, and the latter profited a good deal from the fact that a lively and active group had made its entry.

The field in which this activity has become most evident is undoubtedly that of training. The section for special libraries understood how important a thorough professional training would be to the young industrial librarian, and so it was that in 1946 a start was made with a training course, which had already been prepared during the War. This was such a success that, with the passing of the years, more courses were arranged, which since 1950 have been organized in conjunction with the Netherlands Institute for Documentation and Filing, under the responsibility of a joint training committee. Two years ago considerable additions were made; the number of courses now totals six. There are three "A" courses: "A 1" intended for library staff working in technical libraries, "A 2" for the staff of non-technical libraries, such as libraries of non-technical government institutions, and "A 3" for the lower middle positions in research libraries. The "C" course is intended for trained technical staff charged with literature searching in industrial libraries. This course is particularly directed at imparting knowledge of classifying, searching, and reporting. The "D"

course is a continuation course for holders of the A-certificate and is intended for those who need a wider vision and a deepening of their knowledge in connection with their position in a library. The "B" course for trade archivists has no bearing on the subject of this article.

From the foregoing it is clear that the various courses cater to the needs of most kinds of librarian. The one and very important exception is the members of the academic staff in the great research libraries: the Royal Library at The Hague, the university libraries, the libraries of the technological institutes, of the College of Agricultural Sciences and of the School of Economics. During the War years plans were made for library training on an academic level, but they resulted only in a non-obligatory course for newly-appointed members of the academic staff.

This was the state of affairs a few years ago. Since then there has been a rapid change, a revolutionary development indeed, which makes it impossible to predict what the situation will be after another two or three years. Therefore, we must restrict ourselves to an account of the events in the immediate past and the expectations of the near future.

The first sign of change was the establishment of a new chair in library science at the University of Amsterdam. Since 1954 this University has had a professorship in the science of the book and bibliography, but these subjects were intended to be minors in the study of the history of literature. The chair in library science, however, finds its origin in the difficulty of recruiting good academic people for the scholarly positions in the great research libraries. This is caused partly by the fact that in the large scholarly library of our age there are too many tensions which make it difficult for the scholarly librarian to hold his own and uphold his learning, in turn due partly to a lack of knowledge of library science, which in many respects is still fallow land. It was hoped that by making library science an academic discipline, more students would become interested in the theory and practice of librarianship.

Now, after some years of experience, plans are under way to make the two chairs the nucleus of an academic library training program, by which it will be possible for students of all disciplines to study library science in addition to their main study. It will be a two years' course after the so-called doctoral examination, but with the possi-

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bility of attending the lectures of the first year before the doctoral examination. The second year should be spent in two research libraries; during the year lessons of a more practical character are given, and the period will be concluded by a final state examination. One might call this a Library School with two restrictions: library science will not be an independent discipline crowned with a doctor's degree, although it will be possible to uphold a thesis in the field of library science for a doctorate in one of the faculties; secondly, this Library School is only meant for students of a university, training them for posts on the academic staff of a great library.

As to how far this may have led to a change of ideas in other fields of library training cannot be said, but it is a fact that the long-existing dissatisfaction with the courses for public librarians was ended by the realization that they might soon be integrated in a library school. Following upon a preliminary report by a Committee of the Central Association for Public Libraries in 1961, a Commission on Library Schools was appointed, which issued its report in December, 1962. One of the recommendations made in this report was the establishment of a "foundation" (not in the American sense of the word) for library and documentation schools. A new law on continued education of the same year makes it possible to have such schools financed by the Government. The foundation was realized at the end of 1962, and since then the Board has been busy with the preparatory work for the establishment of two library schools in Amsterdam and Groningen. The curriculum of two years will confine itself, for the time being, to the training of assistants in public libraries. It is hoped that these schools will open in September, 1964.

It hardly needs saying that enormous progress would result from these developments. It is also significant that efforts are being made to insure that the new schools will be opened to students of any denomination. It is the intention to have the two years' program at one of the schools extended by means of a continuation course (similar to the now existing course for the director's certificate), and it is also hoped to integrate after some time the "A" and "D" courses for special librarians. An incidental problem that will arise will be co-ordination with the two chairs at the University of Amsterdam.

It stands to reason that, as things are, it is impossible to prophesy what the developments in the near future will be. Plans are still too vague, and there is too much uncertainty about government grants,

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etc. It is, however, certain that library training in the Netherlands never has known such a crucial time as today, a time that is, without any doubt, a period of the greatest interest and full of promise.

Reference

Netherlands Librarians Association. *Libraries in the Netherlands*. The Hague, The Association, 1961, pp. 5-60.