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"SPECIAL SPEAKER"

Nora Bateson

(Broadcast over CBC Trans-Canada Network
Sunday, May 27, 1945,
9.45-10.00 PM ADT)

A year ago I went to Jamaica at the invitation of the
Jamaica government to suggest a plan for library service for
the island.

1944 was one of the most stirring years in Jamaica's his-
tory. In the last few years there has been a great awakening
of national consciousness and last year Jamaica was given a new
constitution with universal adult suffrage and a House of Re-
presentatives elected on that basis. Jamaica has had great and
inspiring leadership in Norman Washington Manley. He is him-
self a Jamaican, a Rhodes scholar and probably the leading barr-
ister and one of the leading personalities in the West Indies.

Jamaica has many and great problems. It is only a hun-
dred years from slavery. The population of one and a quarter
million is almost entirely black or coloured with a sprinkling
of East Indians and Chinese. It is only one per cent white.
Half the people cannot read or write and the average income is
only \$112 a year. There are many social problems there result-
ing from poverty and lack of education.

Jamaica's problems are great but just as great it seemed
to me was the high spirit of adventure and determination to do
something about them. There is probably nowhere in the world
today a more united, eager, alert people than the educated
young people of Jamaica. The British Government is ready to

help the Island with expert advice and plans and with grants of money. This help is not being handed to an inert people but to a people aware of their needs and with a real belief in their own destiny.

I shall never forget the packed halls where hundreds of young people gathered at 4.30 on hot afternoons in Kingston last summer to listen to various experts talking about responsible government, agriculture cooperation or education. They leaned forward in their seats and listened with eager attention and that ready applause and quick laughter which is so heartening a feature of Jamaican audiences. When Col. Stanley, the British Colonial Secretary, was there recently he said that education was Jamaica's primary need and his statement was echoed by every member of his large audience.

Jamaicans are also expressing themselves with a definite Jamaican accent in writing and painting. Two years ago a most interesting collection of writings was published under the title "Focus". The wife of the political leader, Edna Manley, is herself a sculptor of genius. In public institutions and private homes in Kingston her figures and carvings arrest your attention and give you an unmistakable sense of the abounding vitality, the mystery and the greatness of this people. There is a group of young painters working under Mrs. Manley's inspiration and guidance. With freshness and vigour they are painting in oils and varied loveliness of Jamaica and the exuberent, warm life of their people.

Coming back to libraries. In Kingston, the capital, there is

already a library with a Junior Centre for young people. The Junior Centre is a beautiful building, furnished with mahoe and lignum vitae, lovely local woods, and with an attractive collection of books. The number of young people allowed to use it has to be restricted because of the shortage of books. But whenever an addition is made to the book stock and it is announced that more members can be admitted there is a long line of hopeful, bright-eyed applicants waiting in the street long before the library doors are open. The adult library in Kingston has members all over the Island. It cannot begin to meet the demand for books on practical subjects and the overwhelming demand for books on social, economic and political matters.

I spent almost a year in Jamaica, driving over its twisting, steep roads, with blue mountains lifting their shoulders above you and the turquoise waters of the Caribbean Sea never far away. I talked to all the local government boards and met hundreds of individuals interested in the prospect of a library. I found everyone convinced of the need from the Governor, Sir John Huggins, down to the members of the local government boards. Libraries are not looked upon as a frill but as a necessary part of the educational equipment a people needs if it is going to govern itself.

Begin
TRINIDAD, B. W. I. Has a
Already in the eastern islands of the Caribbean there is a regional library operating from Trinidad, directed by Dr. Helen Stewart of British Columbia. *Nora Bateson recently* I spent a week there and went out from Port of Spain on the book truck which gives service to Trinidad. *GORDON* Very noticeable there was the great interest shown in every sort of practical book: books on the citrus industry, tropical gardening and agriculture, sanitation, accounting and so on, among the men, sewing, embroidery,

cooking and child care among the women. When the book truck broke down two miles from the last stop the news travelled and the crowd walked the two miles to exchange their books.

In all the British West Indies reconstruction in agriculture, social welfare, education is being undertaken. There is general consent that education for adults as well as children is the underlying primary need and libraries are being established because adult education is meaningless without them. *end.*

Back in Canada it seemed to me that what is happening in the West Indies shows our library problem in a new light. We are politically ahead of them. We have had self-government now for three-quarters of a century. Most of our people can read and write. But so far as book provision goes we have five million people, nearly one half of our population, without libraries. Our cities and most of our larger towns have libraries but there is still 95% of our rural population which has nothing approaching satisfactory service.

CANADA'S LIBRARY SERVICE

It is true that Canada's rural population is widely scattered but that is no longer a barrier to book service. All over the world it has been proved that with proper organization libraries on a regional scale can be setup to serve scattered populations. The essentials of good library service are a plentiful book stock and trained librarians to select the books, organize their distribution and give advice and guidance. Small populations cannot afford these essentials but a sufficiently large area and population can pool its resources and secure them. In Canada regional libraries of this type now exist in the West in British Columbia and in the East in Prince Edward Island. . .

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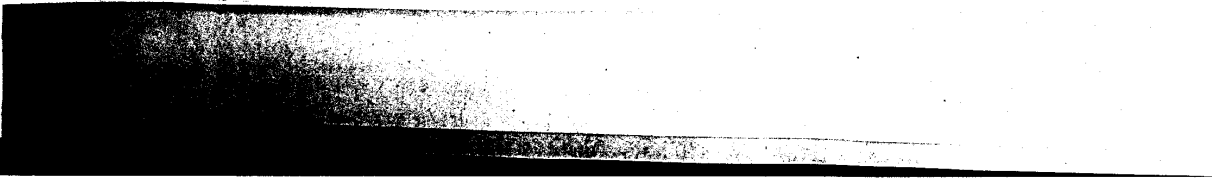
The Fraser Valley Union Library in British Columbia was the pioneer regional library in Canada. It serves the towns and villages of the Fraser Valley through branch libraries and the thinly settled areas are visited every two or three weeks by the bookmobile. I was lucky enough to be on the staff of the staff of the Fraser Valley library the first year of its existence. I remember well the great variety of books that would be taken out in one day's journey as we stopped at country stores, cross-roads, schools and solitary farm houses. Then there would be requests for books not to be found on the shelves of the truck. A farmer wanted anything and everything we could get on growing hazel nuts, there was a rush order for a veterinary dictionary from another farmer with a sick cow. On one occasion we took down with us a sackful of books we had borrowed from the Legislative Library in Victoria. They were complete texts of the Indian scriptures which a retired clergymen was eager to read. In short the book truck and the branches put everyone in the Valley in touch with whatever the printed word had to meet his particular needs.

From 1933 - 6 I had the privilege of putting in the library service in Prince Edward Island. There the book truck is not used because the roads in the less accessible parts are blocked with snow in the winter and winter is the farmer's reading season. The library there serves the whole Island of about 100,000 people, through a system of 24 branches. There are about 50,000 volumes with 1,000 or more in each branch. But any of the books in the library are sent to anyone in the Island requesting them. So that if you want to build a boat you go first to your nearest branch and find out what

they have on boat-building. If you want more information than you find there your request is sent to the headquarters and any book in any of the twenty four branches can be sent to you until you find what you want. Every summer the books in the branch collections are moved so that in time even in the small centres the whole library will pass through. The principle in both British Columbia and Prince Edward Island is the same - to put at the disposal of everyone a wide range of reading from which he can select what he wants: to have in charge of the library trained librarians keeping the collections alive and fitted to the needs of the people, giving personal advice and guidance when this is needed.

During the war I have been working with War Service libraries in the Atlantic area. I was much interested the other winter in two young sailors on a boat running then between Halifax and Iceland. They insisted that they must have books with them: they were used to reading and lost without books they said. I took them to the shelves and they spotted familiar friends and new books they were on the look-out for. I said, "I suppose you come from Toronto." "No", they said, "We come from Souris, P.E.I." Souris is a small village with a branch of the Island library. In the last ten years those boys had come to look upon books as a necessary part of their lives.

Anyone with experience in providing libraries for service men must have been struck most forcibly by one fact. Those regiments and men which came from areas of Canada well supplied with libraries were those who knew how to make use of them when they were made available. Whereas men from the library deserts of Canada were, taken as a whole, unequipped to take full advantage of the books provided.



Such tastes cannot be built up in a day but the provision of children's books in public libraries is an investment for our future citizens.

A few years ago books were part of the munitions of war, helping men in the services to train quickly for new jobs. Today the minds of men in the Services are turning towards home and the interest is in books on farming and other occupations, on building and planning houses. There is a noticeable interest in books on child psychology. In and out of the Services books can be valuable munitions of peace as well as war, giving to farmers and workers of all kinds information on their jobs.

The very continuance of peace depends on our ability to be citizens of the world. As Wendell Wilkie proclaimed the world is one and our thinking in the future must be world wide. That means we have to be informed and intelligent. There is a general currency of ideas in all the progressive countries of the world today. It is the birthright of citizens in a democracy to know what these ideas are. And books are the means of communication.

*NORA BATESON
Excerpt from CBC Broadcast of May 27, 1945*

Hitler, we know, burnt libraries wherever he went. It was one of the surest means of producing a slave mentality. Minds that are starved for long enough of ideas and information do not develop the faculty of thinking freely and creatively. But countries which are building for freedom, countries which hope to make the twentieth century the Century of the Common Man have to see that the generous provision of books and help in their use is not overworked.