

The Future of the Small Subscription Library.

When the Service began it was expected that after a preliminary period of two years, which was needed for organization purposes, many of the small subscription libraries would be able, if they wished, to offer a free service with the aid of their local county. The plans for county services have been largely modified by the outbreak of war, with the consequent need for restriction of motor transport and conservation of fuel, since additional book-vans will be required when it is decided to offer each locality a library service irrespective of whether it already has a small library and its nearness to the route of a book-van. The postponement of the developments referred to may have good results, since much has been learned of the problems which will have to be faced. Although some counties have already shown deep interest in library matters it is probable that others will need fuller demonstration of the benefits to be gained before co-operating with this Service. Also the location of the small library is often far from suitable as a distributing-point for a centre, the local store, school, or post-office being in many cases much more convenient. The possibility of the State having to assume more responsibility for adequate library service in country districts, as distinct from country boroughs, should therefore be faced.

Geographical Distribution of Small Libraries participating.

The following table shows the geographical distribution of the small libraries participating in the Service at 31st March, 1941, compared with the numbers for the two preceding years:—

District.	1940-41.	1939-40.	1938-39.
North Auckland	40	38	28
South Auckland and Waikato	41	36	24
Coromandel, Bay of Plenty, and Gisborne	21	16	9
Taranaki	8	8	5
Main Trunk and centre North Island	16	11	10
Wellington and Hawke's Bay	25	19	8
Total, North Island	151	128	84
Nelson and Marlborough	28	25	15
West Coast	13	12	11
Canterbury	59	53	41
Otago	31	28	12
Southland	20	19	16
Total, South Island	151	137	95
Grand total	302	265	179

OTHER WAYS IN WHICH SERVICE HAS BEEN GIVEN.

Hamper, or "O" Service.

In places where no library exists and where it is not possible for one to be formed, the service to properly established groups by means of travelling hampers has been continued. During the year 47 groups received this service, compared with 37 for the previous year. Of the groups, 29 were in the North Island and 18 in the South. Many of the unit collections which were formed during the first year of the service were recalled during 1940-41 and fresh collections substituted.

Postal, or "D" Service.

During the year 116 persons used this facility, compared with 63 in 1939-40. In exceptional circumstances two books were allowed to a borrower, to offset inevitable delays where mail-transit times are lengthy. Lists of material available in certain subjects have been issued from time to time for the convenience of borrowers.

Request Service.

The issue of posters calling attention to the facilities offered has caused a very sharp rise in the number of requests received from libraries. Altogether 1,432 separate requests for works of non-fiction were received, of which a small number, 28, could not be satisfied. Borrowings from other libraries, notably the General Assembly Library, gave great assistance, 301 volumes being lent to the Service, which in its turn lent 12 volumes.

Periodical Service.

To enable users of smaller libraries to have access to a considerably wider range of periodicals than such libraries can afford to buy regularly, some 92 periodicals have been lent to the free public libraries participating in the Service. Each library receives up to 30 periodicals chosen from the list, in lots of some six to eight, sending its initial lot to another library by post after one month and receiving another in the same way. The effect of this service is that many country people now have access to a range of periodical literature hitherto available only in city libraries.