

The Canadian Book Centre

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CANADA'S most unique library, the Canadian Book Centre, is presently located in Halifax, beside the ocean piers in this all-year Atlantic port. The Centre was officially opened on 4 February, 1949, by the Lieutenant-Governor of Nova Scotia. Since then, a quarter of a million books and periodicals, chiefly non-fictional in character, have been accumulated there for distribution to war-damaged and needy libraries in Europe.

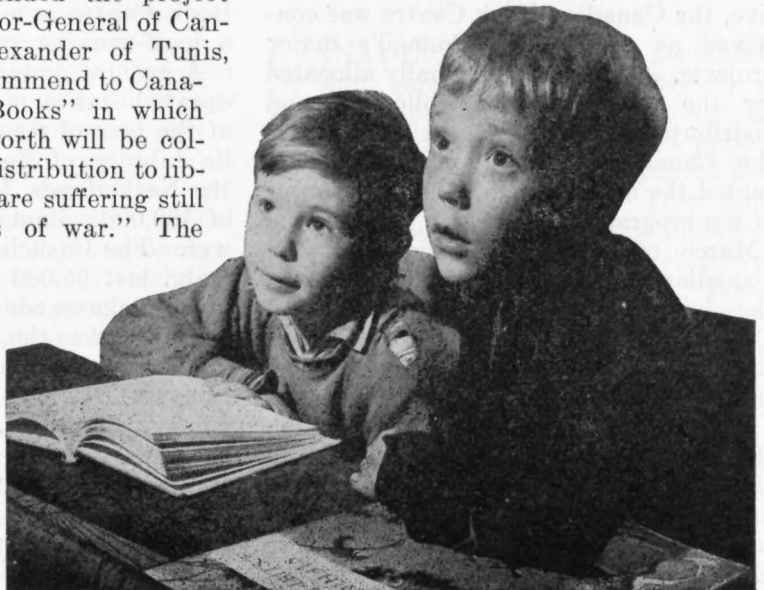
Similar book centres have been established in other countries—for example, the British National Book Centre in London, and the United States Book Exchange (formerly the American Book Center) in Washington—and others are in process of being set up. In Paris, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) has a Clearing House for Publications. Canada once again has assumed her share in an international responsibility and joined in the parade of cultural exchanges.

The "March of Books" campaign in the winter of 1948-49 inaugurated a Canada-wide drive for suitable educational material, and many of the country's leading figures commended the project officially. The Governor-General of Canada, the Viscount Alexander of Tunis, said, "I am happy to commend to Canadians the "March of Books" in which published material of worth will be collected in Canada for distribution to libraries overseas which are suffering still from the after-effects of war." The

Secretary of State for External Affairs, the Honourable L. B. Pearson, observed that "Canada played its full part in meeting the needs of Europe for food and shelter, through contributions to UNRRA and to various voluntary relief funds. We cannot refuse to play our part now in meeting the needs for food for the mind, especially when through our contributions to the mental growth of European people we help to create the conditions necessary for enduring peace." And the Federal Minister of Agriculture, the Right Honourable James Gardiner, spoke from personal knowledge of conditions in Europe when he endorsed the campaign: "I know that educational books which can be made available from Canada for the universities, libraries and teachers in war-damaged areas will be most advantageous to the future of the world."

II

THE Canadian Book Centre was originated by the Canadian Council for Reconstruction through UNESCO (CCRU), from which came the primary





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impetus for recognition of the dire need of European universities and libraries and the responsibilities of Canadians in this work. Through its efforts and initiative, the Canadian Book Centre was conceived as one of the Council's major projects, with \$50,000 originally allocated for the administration, collection and distribution operations. In July, 1948, the Canadian Library Association accepted the invitation to act as co-sponsor of the program. Thereafter, the national "March of Books" campaign and the Canadian Book Centre were directed by the Joint Book Project Committee of CLA and CCRU, under the chairmanship of Miss Margaret Gill, Librarian of the National Research Council in Ottawa.

In June, 1948, when the Canadian Book Centre was still just an idea in the minds of a few individuals, a number of exploratory letters were sent by CCRU to various libraries and institutions in Europe. These letters outlined briefly

the idea for the project and requested comment. The response was immediate and the need was urgent. Since then great progress has been made, and the Book Centre is no longer a dream, but a hard-working reality.

A general picture of the need of European libraries indicates the magnitude of the task of reconstruction. The Public Library of Zeeland, Middelburg, in the Netherlands, lost its entire collection of 100,000 volumes as the result of the war. The Catholic University of Milan, Italy, lost 55,000 volumes, including all of its books on common law. Completely destroyed was the library of the Institute of Economic and Social Studies at Louvain, Belgium, and also the Municipal Library of Douai, France. In Poland, there were about 36,000 libraries before the war, with 22,000,000 books; at the end of the war, only about one-third of these books were still available. The pre-war collection of 317,000 volumes in

the Public Library of Warsaw was totally destroyed. And so the tragic story goes.

Specific requests received at the Canadian Book Centre tell the same story, ever and ever more urgently. And they come not only from Europe, but from all over the world, as the following excerpts reveal:

South India—"I am far away from you, and you can easily imagine my anxiety to get your letter of goodwill along with your materials. I request you to be good enough to send them as early as possible as I need them urgently—securely packed by registered parcel post to ensure safe reaching. I am eagerly awaiting your favourable reply with your parcel of books."

Burma—"As you probably know, during the Japanese occupation of this country, practically all technical books were either destroyed or lost, and it has so far been found impossible to replace more than a very small percentage . . . No matter how old or on what subject, any book will be acceptable, and will, I can assure you, be a *gift* which will not be forgotten by the many thousands of our students and teachers who are now so seriously handicapped."

Indonesia—"During the Japanese war and its aftermath, our Sugar Experimental Station was heavily damaged and our library burnt down. Of our library of more than 30,000 rests only a scanty part . . . Books concerning cultivating and milling of sugar cane are required, but also general and special books about botany, zoology, agronomy, chemistry, physics, technology, technics. We cannot send any publication in return, the stock of these also being burnt down."

Luxembourg—"Nous venons de recevoir votre aimable circulaire et nous nous empressons, tout en vous félicitant vivement de votre généreuse initiative, de vous indiquer les matières dont la Bibliothèque Nationale aimerait élargir et compléter ses fonds."

France—"J'ai l'honneur de vous accuser réception de votre lettre et vous remercie bien vivement de me faire connaître vos intéressants projets. La Bibliothèque de l' Arsenal trouverait un grand profit à bénéficier de vos envois éventuels, dans les domaines suivants:

1. Littérature (texte, histoire, critique),
2. Théâtre, cinéma et tous spectacles (livres et périodiques),
3. Histoire du Canada (Nous sommes assez bien pourvu en livres anciens, jusqu'au XVIIIe siècle, mais très pauvres en ouvrages postérieurs) . . . P.S. Tout ce qui touche les relations culturelles du Canada et de la France me vient particulièrement à coeur."

Poland—"Le Directeur de la Bibliothèque Jagellons à Cracovie, Pologne, salue avec gratitude l'initiative canadienne de suppléer les fonds de la Bibliothèque. Il serait souhaitable de remplir surtout les lacunes causées par la guerre, par manque de l'information bibliographique et les difficultés de libre échange monétaire entre les pays."

III

CANADIANS responded generously and sincerely to the "March of Books" appeal. In approximately six months, over 250,000 books and periodicals of excellent quality had poured into the Canadian Book Centre. They came in car-load lots, and they came in parcel-post packages. One small parcel arrived safely, bearing the simple address "Books for Europe"—and that was all. Even from the United States came letters asking how the senders could help in this worthy cause—they had heard radio broadcasts from Canadian stations. Small children sent prize picture-books in their enthusiasm to help some younger Europeans. All contributions were acknowledged personally as soon as they arrived at the Centre.

Our Canadian libraries and librarians responded wholeheartedly and "house-cleaned" their shelves with a will. The larger contributions came from a cross-section of the country: from the Public Libraries—Toronto, Hamilton, London, Calgary, Vancouver, Victoria; from the Universities—Nova Scotia Technical College, Dalhousie, Montreal, Toronto, Western Ontario; from the Library of Parliament at Ottawa, the Consolidated Mining and Smelting Company at Trail, B. C., the Ontario Research Foundation, and so on. Besides these, there have been the bulk shipments from the regional "March of Books" collection centres in Montreal, Ottawa, Toronto, Windsor, Winnipeg, Regina, and other cities, in which local librarians gave freely of their time and professional knowledge to help "screen" the contributions from their own districts.

In view of the success of the campaign, the public-spirited co-operation and generosity of the average Canadian can hardly be questioned.

The specific goal of the Book Centre has been the collecting of recent or standard books and periodicals in the fields of science, technology, law, medicine, the arts, etc., and making them available for distribution, free of charge, to needy and war-ravaged libraries abroad. Peace and progress have always stemmed from minds stimulated by the free exchange of knowledge and ideas, and the chief instruments of this vital communication are books. There is still a desperate lack of books in many of these centres of learning. From scores of overseas libraries come graphic and urgent reports of the need for information in every field of learning. Canada's answer to this tragic appeal was the "March of Books" campaign of last winter and the present establishment of the Canadian Book Centre in Halifax as the agency responsible for the operational library procedure.

IV

THE BOOK CENTRE carefully re-screened the contributions according to a general *What to Send* guide drawn up by the Joint Committee in Ottawa. The material was then classified within some twenty-odd subject groupings. Periodically these subject-lists are printed in small pamphlet form and mailed to overseas libraries, universities and other institutions. The prospective recipient indicates the exact items he needs in his library and forwards his request to the Book Centre. There are no priorities or favouritisms in allocating the items asked for, unless the request be entirely unreasonable in character.

Staff at the Book Centre at one time reached a peak of fourteen, including the Director and the Librarian (both of whom are qualified librarians) as well as the clerical and shipping assistants. One member of the staff has six languages at her command, and a working knowledge of many others. In the process of coping with a quarter million items, over thirty different languages were represented — everything from old Anglo-Saxon to Miemac Indian.

As the donations were unpacked and counted at the Book Centre, they were roughly sorted into four classifications:

1. Suitable for Europe,
2. Textbooks of grammar-school level,
3. Discards, and
4. Canadiana and old works.

School textbooks of the lower or intermediate educational level were carefully set aside and earmarked for shipment to Ethiopia, where the national Education Department is now staffed by Canadian personnel.

The third heading used above—*Discards* — is really misleading without further explanation. The discards are not simply thrown into the furnace and burned. They are discards only in the



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The Library of Parliament, at Ottawa, was established in 1841, on the union of the Provinces of Upper and Lower Canada. Its valuable collection will form the nucleus of the proposed National Library of Canada.

sense that they do not fit into the category of books considered suitable for Europe in the *What to Send* guide, nor into the school-book category for Ethiopia. On the other hand, they may come under the fourth classification, in which case they might well be kept in Canada. For example, some items of Canadiana should logically be placed in our National Library, when it is established, while some early editions of well-known works should be in the Public Archives of Canada. All these special considerations were kept in mind when the books were being finally screened and classified by the Book Centre Librarian, in order that nothing should be sent out of Canada

that rightfully and logically belongs in this country.

At the present time, there are separate categories set aside for future consideration by the CLA-CCRU Joint Committee in Ottawa—including Canadiana, old editions and discards. Still other items in the third category may well be useful in small Canadian libraries and schools. So, even the "discards" will be useful too!

V

SPEAKING of "discards." An interesting feature at Canada's Book Centre is the "Trophy Wall" in the Director's office. On this wall are one-time

souvenirs that were carefully put away in books by their readers and then forgotten. Some are nearly 100 years old, others are as recent as this year's parking ticket. But each one represents a story—a chapter or an incident out of someone's life story.

Looking at this odd collection, one cannot help wondering—and perhaps even romancing, just a little, human nature being what it is! Here's a sample of the thoughts that run through the mind of just one person:

Who cut off that lock of hair and preserved it in the old family Bible? To whom did it belong. Where are they now?

Who was the 'Mistress Ella Sweet' who gave the corn-husking party, and carefully wrote the invitations by hand, with the appropriate illustrations of an ear of corn about to be husked. Who was at the party, and do they remember it?

Who were the guests at the dinner-party at the Fort Garry Hotel in Winnipeg on 11 April, 1914, celebrating the forthcoming marriage of one of the group? Do they recall autographing the menu?

Where now are the YMCA Officers of Acadia University for 1916-1917?

Who had the honor of receiving the RCMP parking ticket in Ottawa on 16/5 49? He probably remembers it only too well!

Who carefully saved the souvenir ribbon of the 'Glorious 12th' in Truro, 1902?

Who began a letter, "To His Excellency Baron Jutaro K" from No. 3 Bund, Yokohama, and never finished it?

Who painted the water-color landscapes and then forgot about them?

Who? Why? Where? When?

Question after question tantalizes the mind as one looks over this truly amazing collection of bookmarks and ex-souvenirs, once prized and now forgotten by their original owners.

VI

IN JUNE of this year, the Canadian Book Centre began distribution of its pamphlet-form book-lists, with the

items arranged by subjects. The first one was *Literature and Language*, a thirty-two page brochure which included over 1,500 titles. From this list alone more than 4,000 books have been allocated. By the end of August, over 7,000 books and periodicals in two subject fields alone had been prepared for shipment abroad, and the distribution machinery was only beginning to function. The Book Centre envisages that all European distribution will be completed by March, 1950, and will encompass approximately 200,000 items.

When the distribution policy was being discussed by the Joint Book Project Committee at Ottawa, it was agreed that only a limited number of European countries could be satisfactorily supplied. Needs were extensive and exhaustive, but the supplies were necessarily limited. So the decision was made to allocate the material to only eight countries—France, Belgium, the Netherlands, Poland, Luxembourg, Italy, Greece and the Western Zone of Germany. Within these eight countries, an *over-all* mailing list was compiled consisting of about 600 libraries, universities, and professional associations and societies. It is from these that the requests have been pouring in regularly since their receipt of the first book-list.

It must be remembered, too, that each and every item allocated by the Book Centre for European distribution has been *specifically requested*. In other words, there has been no "dumping" of unwanted material—nor will there be. Consequently, there can be no waste of time and effort, and no financial waste by bulk distribution of useless items.

It is worthy of note here that the requests from Europe have been well and carefully selected, and to date there have been no "bulk requests" for all titles listed. From this the conclusion can be reasonably drawn that just as the Book Centre's plan avoids dumping, so the European libraries are anxious not to load themselves with "any kind" of stock.

Without exception, the European recipients are overjoyed at the prospect of being able to add to their pathetically meagre library collections—especially as the Canadian books and periodicals are free of charge to them. The Book Centre expects that shipments will be carried without charge by the various shipping lines to the port of entry of the recipient country. From there to the final destination, it is anticipated that the inland freight charges will be assumed either by our own Canadian Mission or by the Government of the country concerned. Therefore the only charge to the

recipient institution is the cost of mailing its original request to the Book Centre.

Thus Canada's Book Centre goes steadily forward with the task of representing the Canadian people in their goodwill project of re-stocking devastated European book shelves with up-to-the-minute cultural, scientific and technical information of all kinds. In years to come, our Canadian spirit of international co-operation will be unquestionably substantiated in the libraries of Europe, for the benefit of all who wish to learn—regardless of creed or nationality.

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