

The Acquisition Problem Concerning British Government Documents in the United States

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THERE ARE FOUR WAYS of acquiring British government documents in the United States: they can be ordered directly through Her Majesty's Stationery Office in London, through the British Information Service in New York, through a London bookseller, or through an American dealer.

All these ways are unsatisfactory. In some great American university libraries—those that maintain a comprehensive collection of British government documents—there is a growing sense of exasperation with the obscurantist pettifogging and unimaginative governmental methods of distribution and with the goodhearted but ineffectual efforts of the booksellers and dealers who only undertake this service, really, to oblige. But they are far more understanding of the problem than are government officials.

Let a librarian deal with Her Majesty's Stationery Office directly and with every shipment there will come little bills: three pence, one and seven pence, two pounds eight shillings and eleven pence, all of them have to be laboriously translated into dollars and cents by a library clerk and all processed. There is no idea in Her Majesty's Stationery Office how valuable, how appreciated, would be a charge account for these libraries, all reputable institutions.

Let the Office send to The University of California at Berkeley, New York Public Library, Harvard, Stanford—there are really very few university libraries involved—all the documents requested, and send a bill at the end of the year, of the quarter, of the month, and the whole problem would be solved. Despite letters on the subject suggesting this all the answers that I have received have been evasive.

Let a librarian deal with the British Information Service in New York and the service is leisurely and expensive. Stanford University Library, a British Government Depository for documents during the war, and at present maintaining the most comprehensive collection of them on the Pacific Coast is suffering severely from the vagaries of this situation. There is a great resentment among academic people generally concerning the prices charged at B.I.S. at its enviable location in the Rockefeller Center and the inadequacy of its operation. Recently it is true, after constant complaint and pressure, they have reduced their prices somewhat, but until recently they were blandly treating the pound as if it had not been devalued, and this created an impression of dark dealing.

Let a librarian deal with a bookseller agent, a shame that he has even to consider this method (in the past few years many great libraries have all been forced by the

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the institutes in setting up sound systems of library administration, and above all, they should see to it that the efficiency of their own libraries is vastly improved.

As for the institute libraries Reincke believes that a clear definition is needed as to what each of them shall collect, so as to avoid unnecessary overlapping. Little used material should be turned over to the university library. He is not certain whether a union catalog for the university as a whole would warrant the efforts and cost it entails, but he strongly advocates a union catalog of periodicals. Large institutes must obviously employ professional librarians; for the many smaller ones he suggests that institutes in related fields should share the services of a trained person. Merging of small libraries into a strong departmental library should be undertaken wherever possible (e.g. law, economics, theology).

For the American reader of Reincke's memorandum most of these recommendations will appear to be nothing more than common sense; for many German university librarians they amount to little short of heresy. The Forschungsgemeinschaft has already received a great number of protests from both the institutes and the main university libraries; far from being dismayed, it welcomes the fact that this issue has been

forced into the open for general discussion.

An unbiased observer will scarcely challenge the facts as Reincke presents them, nor is he likely to take exception to the remedies he proposes. What is lacking, however, is a clear statement that the idea of universality, once embodied solely in the university library, must now be shared with all libraries within the confines of the university. Once this principle has been generally accepted, the artificial barriers between university libraries and institute libraries will gradually disappear. The university librarian should accept with good graces the inevitable developments in the academic world which are responsible for turning his library more and more into a central collection of less frequently used material—and at the same time, into a study center where students can consult and borrow books of current interest. By giving guidance to the institute libraries and by a policy of close cooperation the main library can nevertheless again play a vital part in the life of the university as a whole. Knowing the extent to which most German university librarians are bound by tradition and also the extreme individualism of the average German professor, I do not anticipate an early solution. However, the very fact that the discussions have begun is in itself an encouraging sign.

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clumsy and non-cooperative attitude of the other two agencies to try these ways), and he finds that the well-meaning bookseller, doing this as a favor to a client, becomes swamped in the plethora and is unable to give good service.

The worst of this is not the poor method of distribution, although that is bad enough, but the bad impression created in this country of official British services. It

would be gracious, wise and far seeing if the United Kingdom reactivated the depository system. Stanford would be glad to pay a lump sum annually for the "privilege." All means of protest having failed so far it is my hope that some eminent visiting Englishman will become aware of the situation through reading this plaint and upon his return home make representations to improve this sorry business.