

Library of Congress Sends Books to Any Town

If You Want a Rare Work of Reference Your Home Library Will Get It for You from the Great Washington Institution

YOU have been for twenty years engaged on an epoch-making work dealing with, we will say, the tendency of the male adult mosquito to cardiac aneurism. In order to complete the book it is necessary for you to consult Professor Karl Robert Foster's "Climatic Susceptibility of Mosquitoes," (proceedings of the Royal Biological Society, University of Edinburgh, June, 1903.) The Carnegie Library of your native town, which is Dusenburyville, Ala., does not contain this volume.

What are you to do? Professor Foster's monograph is not to be obtained at any bookshop in this country, and you cannot afford to travel to one of the university libraries, where it might possibly be found. It would take too long to import it from Scotland. Must you bring out your book without consulting this authority?

No, if such a book exists as this hypothetical work of Professor Foster, it is safe to assume that a copy is to be found in the Congressional Library at Washington, and that copy you may consult. Furthermore, it will not be necessary for you to go to Washington to do so. You may consult the volume without leaving Dusenburyville—it will be sent to you from Washington.

There are thousands of people all over the country who constantly make use of the Library of Congress and yet have never been within gunshot of the District of Columbia. The important and yet little-known branch of the activities of the Library of Congress which makes this possible was explained in detail to a representative of THE NEW YORK TIMES recently by Herbert Putnam. Seated at his desk in his office on the main floor of the building, the Librarian of Congress described the purposes of this work and the way in which the library is made to serve all citizens of the country.

"The library of the British Museum," he said, "is purely a reference library. It is a magnificent collection, but it is of use only to those who can go to London to consult it. The Library of Congress is, of course, used as a reference library by thousands of people every year. But it is also a lending library, and therefore it renders to the American citizen a service which the British Museum Library does not render to the British citizen.

"This is a work in which the Library of Congress is following the lead of some of the great libraries of Europe, especially of those of Germany. The great libraries of the Continent have been surprisingly generous in lending to scholars throughout Europe, including American scholars sojourning there. They lend even manuscripts quite freely. They require, of course, that the borrower shall be an accredited person, but if he be accredited they will lend to him, no matter how great may be the distance between him and the library, books and manuscripts of rarity and value.

"Of course, there is much to be said for the purely reference library. Some of our material—such as the valuable documents placed here by their owners for safe keeping—is used only for reference purposes. Sometimes transcripts of it are sent out.

"The system on which books are sent out to borrowers is as follows: If a man engaged in serious research needs a book which his own local library lacks, which it cannot naturally be expected to have, he may ask his local library to get it for him from the Library of Congress. This will be done, and his only expense will be the cost of the transportation of the volume.

"The loan rests on the theory of a special service to scholarship which it is not

within the power or the duty of the local library to render. Its purpose is to aid research calculated to advance the boundaries of knowledge, by the loan of unusual books not readily accessible elsewhere.

"Therefore, books that should be in a local library or that can be borrowed from a library having a particular duty to the community from which the application comes, (a State library, for example,) are lent by the Library of Congress. Neither are books that are inexpensive and can easily be procured, nor textbooks, nor books for the general reader, nor to be used for recreation or self-culture. But unusual books to satisfy unusual needs—these the Library of Congress is glad to lend.

"And we find that people all over the country are eager to take advantage of this service. We are constantly sending out books to borrowers sometimes as far distant as San Francisco and Cuba. During the year ended June 30, 1914, we sent out 2,030 volumes. During the year ended June 30, 1915, we sent out 2,258 volumes, and during the year ended June 30, 1916, we sent out as interlibrary loans 3,460 volumes to 393 different libraries in forty-eight States and in Canada.

"We lend music on the same condition as books. We do not, however, allow musical scores so lent to be used for public performances.

"We exclude from material that may be loaned that which is in constant use at Washington, the absence of which from shelves of the Library of Congress would be an inconvenience to Congress, or to the Executive Departments of the Government, or to reference readers. These conditions exclude from the loan system, as a rule, genealogies, local histories, newspapers, and periodicals. Only in exceptional cases do we send out material which, because of its size or its character, requires expensive packing or high insurance."

Dr. Putnam seems to be more interested in the library as an institution serviceable to the whole country than in the library as a literary treasure house. He showed the reporter files of letters from all parts of the country, requests for the loan of books sent by scholars through their local libraries. And he explained in detail the service rendered by the Library of Congress in sending out lists of authorities and answering questions through the mail.

"This has developed," he said, "into a very significant part of the library's work. The library issues numerous lists which, if they are not contributions to science, in the sense that they advance knowledge of the subject matter, are something more than mere accumulations of titles. They are lists of books, documents, and magazine articles having to do with subjects of current interest. They are distributed widely to libraries throughout the country.

"These lists have proved of the greatest value and are constantly in use by research workers. But in case the scholar finds that the library he uses contains no list of material on the subject in which he is especially interested, he may obtain such a list by writing, through his local library, to the Library of Congress. Twelve or fifteen thousand such requests reach the Library of Congress every year. They are answered, even if they are not for a list of books but for some specific information, provided that the question can be answered without the expenditure of more time and energy than is warranted by the value of the information desired.

"The character of the questions which the library is expected to answer varies greatly. In general I would say that the questions which seem to us most legiti-

mate and worthy of attention are those which have to do with our possession of a particular book, with the existing bibliographies on a particular subject, with the most useful existing authorities on a particular subject and where these may be available, as to the author of a book by a known title, and as to the date, price, and probable present cost of a specified book. Within reasonable limits the library replies to questions as to the source of particular quotations, if the information be ascertainable by ready reference, and for other particular facts in history or literature or in the organization or operations of the Federal Government.

"We make extracts, on request, from books in our possession, if these extracts are of moderate length. The library's willingness to compile lists of authorities has led to its being almost flooded with demands, especially from students in secondary schools or colleges. Now it requests that all such inquiries be made through the institution in which the inquirer is studying; and where the inquiry can be answered by the local or a nearby institution it is referred back, it not being the theory that the Federal Government shall substitute itself for the local, but merely supplement the local."

The Library of Congress aids the local libraries, and through them the citizens, in yet another way, which Dr. Putnam explained. It publishes and sells, for a nominal price library cards embodying a complete catalogue entry, by author, and for the most part by subject also; for every book currently received by the Library of Congress, and the major portion of the books in its existing collection. These cards, which are "standard" in form and size, and may be inserted into the card catalogue of any American library, also indicate the classification of each book in the Library of Congress.

The library issues many publications, among which, so far, is no one comprehensive catalogue in book form. The catalogue in course of preparation is being printed on cards. It has, however, issued several partial catalogues in book form, such as the lists of American newspapers, of American and English genealogies, of maps of America and of atlases, and of sections of its music collection. It issues numerous reference lists and indices and annual reports.

Among the most useful publications of the library may be mentioned the earlier edition of the "A. L. A. Catalogue." This is a list of 8,000 books suitable for a small library, and it has been found of great value. The list of "Information Circulars" is extensive, and under art, music, geography, history, manuscripts, newspapers, political science and economics, and bibliographies the lists of the Library of Congress's publications are surprisingly large.

Two texts have been issued in extenso for the purpose of saving the original manuscripts from wear and tear, and for the convenience of investigators who cannot pursue a course of study of the originals at Washington. One of these is "The Journals of the Continental Congress," edited from the original records in the library. So far over twenty volumes have appeared, covering the years 1774-1782. The entire work may comprise thirty volumes, and the publication extend over an additional five or six years. The other is "The Records of the Virginia Company of London," 1619-1624, the Court Book from the manuscript in the Library of Congress, in two

volumes. There has been prepared a complete list of the publications of the library, with notes of the prices at which they may be had, and this list is given out on application.

Dr. Putnam did not, in the course of his conversation with THE TIMES man, speak of the Library of Congress as a national university. But he showed that he thought of it as a university, that the phase of its work which interested him most was the extension of its services to as large a company of citizens as possible. Designed primarily as a collection of books to be consulted by Government officials, it has become, in every sense of the word, the great national library, and it is as a national library that it is developing under Dr. Putnam's direction.