

## IN THE LIBRARIES

### The American Library Association in Paris

By special correspondent of The Christian Science Monitor

PARIS, France—When a quite tangible portion of America, in the shape of the A. E. F. and all the organizations that accompanied it, poured into France, some of it found itself in most unexpected environments. For instance, the American Library Association is housed in the one-time dwelling of the Papal Legate in Paris. Most of the millions of books sent by the American public to its soldiers in Europe find their first berth in the capacious cellars of the former Papal dignitary, and there pours through the dark and cryptic passages a constant stream of information, diversion, encouragement, solace and instruction for American boys overseas.

Upstairs, one finds the contrast between original purpose and ultimate use as great. Along a paved driveway and up marble steps between graceful bronze ladies upholding lamps, comes a constant khaki-clad stream of men from all branches of the service. And when they are looking for books. Their search is in a room that has identical

is so kindly with its present use that it is to be doubted if one man in ten, on his first visit, notices that he is really in a marble reception hall whose mauve-toned walls and dark pillars reach up and support small balconies flanking a huge mirror set so high in the wall that its only purpose can be to multiply the effect of height and space, and the apparent number of the delicate yet opulent gilt ornaments that are a feature of all the decorations.

What the men do see are the laden book shelves—just utility shelves, that are really the boxes the books came in piled up—the delivery desk with an American librarian at it whose chief duty seems to be to prove to the visiting soldiers that all their wants can be supplied, and the wide doorways on either side inviting them into spacious reading rooms flooded with light.

One of these rooms is for the reading of periodicals and newspapers, and the other for reference books—the latter more librarylike than the former, but not nearly as picturesquely interesting. That front room, where boys in khaki sit and read the home newspaper, is a thing of dainty pale mauve and gold paneled walls, and an exquisite painted ceiling that seems to be the constant joy of certain fat cupids who gaze on it from sundry coigns of vantage. But though one receives a tremendous impression of novel interest, one does not feel any incongruity. The beauty of that room and the warmth from the marble fireplace never lavished their cheer more suitably than on these young victors, looking for news from home while they finish their duty in another land.

As for the librarylike reference room, it has an interest that does not appear on the surface. Since the

armistice every effort has been made to help the soldier who is so inclined to put to good use each moment of the time of waiting. Educational work of all sorts has been undertaken both by the army and the Y. M. C. A., and the Sorbonne offers courses in French especially adapted to the needs of the men. These courses imply quantities of special textbooks, and these the A. L. A. has undertaken to supply, whether the course be one given in Paris or at any of the army units in occupied territory. Those taking the Sorbonne courses naturally make A. L. A. headquarters their place of study, so this reference room is besieged by eager readers of law, mechanics, architecture, or any other of the branches offered.

A man does not have to be stationed in Paris to get the benefit of the A. L. A. This fact is advertised in the American soldier's European newspaper, Stars and Stripes, where there appears daily a list of about 120 headings under which books may be had. As General Pershing has extended the franking privilege to the A. L. A., there is no difficulty for the soldier, who merely writes a request for the books he wants, and bundles them up and puts them in a mail box when he has finished with them. The losses are almost incredibly small, and the percentage of them due to any fault of the boys is, declare the librarians, negligible. They tell of soldiers who, marching from one post to another in the days before the war was over, actually carried books, in addition to their equipment, for days on end because there was no place from which to mail them back. And they show a telegram sent by an eager doughboy who wanted to obey the rules, yet who did want that book two weeks more, and could he keep it that long? He could, as their immediately wired reply assured him.

Among the 2000 daily letters received from soldiers is many a human document. Hundreds of mere formal requests reveal stories of young men, studying professions or trades at home, who shelved their own interests at the first call, and who, now that there is time for it, are again seeking, this time in a foreign land and in strangest circumstances, to make of themselves citizens who shall add luster to their own land in peace as in war. There are letters from the exceptionally cultivated, asking, with a note of doubt sometimes, for some highly intellectual work, and getting it; and there are letters from the plainly homesick lad who wants "a good story if possible, but not too much love." And he gets that, too.

One could hardly count the requests

received for books on mechanics of sorts, advertising, salesmanship, and Spanish. These particular requests very evidently come from those who expect to take up their alert American life again exactly where they left off. There is a goodly percentage of the sort who learn from every new environment. These want books on French law, European history and art, and, most of all, architecture. This especially seems to have impressed men of even the humblest cultivation when they have noticed how common stone and mortar, destined for humblest uses, can be made to express such qualities as grace and sprightliness and warmth.

As for the way the boys accept this library service, that in itself is a story ranging all the way from a childlike "Thanks, because you tried to please my chum and me," to "Deep love from the heart," from the letter of an officer who had secured books for his men, and who happened to realize what that service meant. One of the most striking testimonials of appreciation is the Sunday afternoon at library headquarters, where the men crowd around the big open fires to read their books as boys do at home

or move about quietly among the bookshelves hunting for favorite volumes.

So the Papal Legate's erstwhile dwelling becomes a familiar haunt for American boys. They may roam at will through its lovely parlors, or ascend its winding marble staircase to the business department, from which no soldier is ever excluded. For if he fancies he would know the book he wants if he saw it, the boy may search through mailing or receiving or filing room till he lights on what he wants. And he may prowl, too, through the secret passages that lead up back ways, where beauty ceases with startling abruptness and crookedness and darkness are the chief characteristics. But go where he will, today he can find nothing but service, whose only purpose is to bring more light into his life in appreciation of his brave fight for more light for the world.

### FIREMEN'S ACT SIGNED

Special to The Christian Science Monitor from its Southern News Office

COLUMBIA, South Carolina—The number of hours which firemen may work is limited to 12 hours daily under the terms of a bill just signed by Governor Cooper. Heavy fines and imprisonment are provided for violation. The act is applicable to cities of more than 10,000 inhabitants and less than 55,000, and therefore does not apply to the city of Charleston.

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