

Ed oggi che la vita venir meno
mi sento, torna ancora di quell'istante
lo sgomento, ed il cor mi balza in seno.
— Chi son? Chi fui? che mai sarò? — Le vane
domande eterne, a cui nessun risponde!
L'oggi oscuro non meno del dimane.
Siam come l'acque entro le brevi sponde
del fiume che l'andar mai non rimane,
che s'incalzano al mare onde su onde ».

* * *

Il sonetto spuntò, dopo la gestazione di quasi mezzo secolo, nel 1941.

Alcuni anni dopo, ritrovata la fede, il Vischi riprendeva l'inquietante domanda dando una risposta serena nell'asterisco seguente:

Chi son io?

« Norberto Varenne, in *Bel-Ami* del Maupassant, scrive: — Io sono un essere perduto. Non ho nè padre, nè madre, nè fratelli, nè moglie, nè figli, nè Dio. Non ho che il verso.

No, io non sono un essere perduto,
madre non ho più, nè padre, nè fratelli;
ma, sì, consorte e figlio.
Ho Dio!
Per l'intelletto, amor di poesia ».

RODOLFO FANTINI

Le Biblioteche britanniche nel XX secolo

Presso la sede del *British Council* di Bologna il Direttore del *British Museum* di Londra, Sir Frank Francis, ha parlato sul tema: *Le Biblioteche britanniche nel XX secolo*.

L'importanza della conferenza, che verteva sui vari aspetti del sistema biblioteconomico inglese, non è sfuggita all'attenzione dei bibliotecari, degli studiosi, degli specialisti, dei cittadini, che numerosi hanno partecipato alla importante manifestazione culturale.

Sir Frank Francis ha detto che sebbene in Inghilterra non esista un sistema bibliotecario, nello stretto senso della parola, i servizi forniti dalle biblioteche sono, in tutti i campi, molto completi. Le biblioteche per bambini e le biblioteche scolastiche sono simili in tutto il Paese ed hanno la funzione di attrarre i ragazzi verso i libri, di incoraggiare alla lettura i giovanissimi, di fornire libri per la lettura a domicilio e di preparare la via affinché gli adulti usino i libri con intelligenza. L'uso delle biblioteche pubbliche — amministrato dalle autorità locali — è aumentato del 75 % dal 1939, e mentre si nota la sempre crescente necessità per un numero maggiore — e più moderno — di edifici per biblioteche pubbliche, sono stati fatti in questo campo miglioramenti notevoli nella qualità dei servizi forniti. Ottime collezioni di libri sono disponibili per il prestito a domicilio, ed è stato recentemente adottato un sistema di « autosufficienza regionale » per assicurare che almeno una copia di ogni libro inglese di recente pubblicazione sia disponibile in « regioni » facilmente accessibili. Sono state istituite anche biblioteche di consultazione in quei luoghi ove gli studi possono essere intrapresi con serietà; un'indicazione dell'uso cui possono essere adibite tali biblioteche è data dal fatto che circa 1.100 lettori frequentano ogni giorno la nuova biblioteca di consultazione nel Distretto di Holborn. Biblioteche pubbliche di consultazione hanno anche iniziato importanti sistemi di collaborazione destinati ad assistere imprese locali, commerciali ed industriali, allo scopo di usufruire al massimo delle informazioni commerciali e tecniche. Molte imprese industriali posseggono le proprie biblioteche e le proprie sezioni di informazione che raccolgono le notizie utili ai propri scopi commerciali ed industriali.

Per quanto riguarda le università — ha continuato Sir Frank Francis — grandi progressi sono stati fatti durante gli ultimi anni, essendo stati costruiti nuovi edifici da adibire a biblioteche; molti altri sono attualmente in costruzione o in preparazione. Opere utili a studenti universitari, sia per studi specializzati che di cultura generale, vengono fornite su larga scala, e speciali biblioteche di facoltà vengono create per laureandi e per coloro che desiderano approfondire i loro studi e compiono lavori di ricerca.

Sul piano nazionale, si stanno predisponendo piani per la costruzione di un nuovo edificio per la Biblioteca del *British Museum*. L'attuale edificio del *British Museum*, infatti, ha più di cento anni, e nonostante le aggiunte e le modifiche non dispone di spazio sufficiente per fornire al pubblico adeguati servizi. Il nuovo edificio ospiterà sotto lo stesso tetto le sezioni: Libri Stampati, Manoscritti, Libri Stampati e Manoscritti orientali, Stampe e Disegni. In esso sarà possibile fornire ai lettori servizi generali e specializzati in una serie di sale di lettura e di centri di servizio accuratamente coordinati. Vi sarà anche spazio adeguato per gallerie di esposizione e per altri servizi che,

presumibilmente, avranno un ruolo importante nel fornire informazioni alle zone di nuovo sviluppo in tutto il mondo.

Questa conferenza ha dimostrato come in Inghilterra si tenga conto con vivo interesse della necessità di *biblioteche della comunità*. Pertanto, siamo lieti di pubblicare il testo integrale della conferenza, che è stata tenuta dal più illustre bibliografo britannico con l'ausilio di interessanti diapositive.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a matter of great regret that on my first visit to Bologna I should have to speak to you in English; but this is something that I cannot do anything about, and I must apologise. I wish I could speak in Italian.

Now what I have been asked to talk about this evening is British Libraries at the present time. This is difficult, because there is little time to develop the ideas that I should like to develop; and as I should like to show you some slides, it will again be difficult to devote as much time as I should like to the subject. What I want to do is to show briefly how modern ideas in the field of librarianship have been exemplified in the work of certain types of library in the United Kingdom. In the last twenty or thirty years, and especially since the end of the last war, there has been a great development in the conception of the part that a librarian can play in the community, both from the point of view of recreation and leisure occupation, and from that of the provision of information to people in industry, commerce and academic life. Nowadays the library is looked upon as playing a vital and energetic role in the life of the community at all levels. It has come out into the market place, so to speak, to play an active part, instead of being simply a passive institution that is useful only when someone is actually making use of it.

I want to reserve a special part of my talk, at the end, for the British Museum, partly because I think it will interest you as an institution and partly because there are plans for its development which, I hope, will enable it to do what has been done in many other kinds of library in Britain; prepare and equip itself to meet the new demands made of a modern library.

I should like to begin by talking for a moment about what are called « special libraries »; I do this because these libraries, which are a very recent creation, are pivotal examples of these new developments. More than any other kind of library, they have shown that a library can play a very important part in the work of its users.

Special libraries came into being to fill a particular need: the need, felt by scientists, technologists and specialists of all kinds, for quick access to literature of value to them in their researches, their businesses and crafts. Unlike the library user with whom we

are traditionally familiar, the people who use special libraries are anxious for information, and want it quickly; they often want access to information which they do not know exists but which they expect the library to provide for them. Now it needs only a moment's thought to realise that this is an entirely different idea from the idea with which we grew up, that a library is a big collection of books at the disposal of people to use as they wish. The special librarian of to-day is no longer simply the custodian of the books; he must supply and even anticipate the needs of his public. He must give them what they want before they know what they want themselves, and I find this one of the most stimulating ideas to have come up in the field of librarianship during the last twenty years. The job of the librarian has changed out of all recognition.

Now I want to show — rather summarily, I'm afraid — how libraries are meeting this particular type of challenge in the United Kingdom. I shall discuss first of all the public libraries, i.e. those financed and controlled by local authorities. They are primarily intended for leisure reading, both recreational and instructional; they are intended for all classes of the community, and they are supported by all classes of the community through local taxes. These libraries are just over a hundred years old. In the middle of the nineteenth century, when there was a great deal of agitation for the creation of public libraries, it was often said that the United Kingdom compared very unfavourably with other countries in Europe in this respect. On the Continent there were fine town libraries with traditions going back in many cases several hundred years, and there were excellent university libraries. In England there were very few libraries of this kind. But since the public libraries were started 100 years ago, the service has developed remarkably, and though not all parts of the country are equally well provided with library services, there is no doubt about the quality of the service that is offered.

The lending libraries aim at providing all the books that the average person can expect to read in his normal recreational time. But there is also an extensive system of inter-library lending and it is possible to borrow, through one's local library, a book from any public library in the country. This co-operative system of lending is comprehensive and works very well. The public libraries nowadays provide good reference rooms, and in some cases they have individual study rooms too. Many libraries also provide gramophone records on loan, and some have built up a picture loan service, by which members of the public can borrow works of art, often by local artists, for considerable periods of time. Many British public libraries also possess good local collections, with books, prints, manuscripts etc. illustrating the locality in which they are situated. In Birmingham, for example, there is one of the world's greatest Shakespeare collections.

Some public libraries have also taken an active part in providing information for local industry. In Sheffield, for example, which is the centre of the English steel industry, there's a very fine library devoted to the iron and steel industry, and the libraries in the neighbourhood are organised into a sort of co-operative scheme, whereby all their resources are pooled. Similarly, in my home town of Liverpool, there is a very fine commercial library service that provides directories and periodicals from all parts of the world for the benefit of the shipping and commerce of the city.

As I said, the public libraries were started just over a century ago, and it follows that many of the buildings in which they were housed are now out of date, and since the war, many of the public libraries have been preparing and designing new buildings. Moreover, many buildings were destroyed by bombing during the last war.

I've brought some slides illustrating two public libraries. The first is a London library, situated in the Borough of Holborn, which is the borough in which the British Museum is located. Though it may seem strange for the Librarian of the British Museum to use a public library, I do in fact go to the Holborn library for some at least of my leisure reading. As you see, the building is up-to-date and effective, without being in any way extravagant in its design. The entrance is attractive, with a glass partition and a little garden inside. All the books are of course freely accessible, and there's plenty of room for movement inside. The reference room also has plenty of space for its readers; this, incidentally, is one of the libraries that possess individual study rooms. This library also lends pictures to the inhabitants of the borough, and here they are hung for viewing, in a pleasant room with comfortable easy chairs. Here you see a further development: on the top floor of this public library there is a hall that can be used for lectures, gramophone recitals, meetings, theatricals etc. It is available to societies at very cheap rates. This library seems to me to meet very well the various needs of the community.

Now there is one other important development I should like to show you, which again shows the public library going out into the community to meet the community's needs. This is a project for a library in a crowded area in the centre of London in a district called the Borough of St. Pancras. This district was designed by one of the famous British architects of the early nineteenth century, John Nash, as a middle-class residential locality, and it was built between 1830 and 1838. It was badly bombed during the war, and had also suffered from neglect before the war. It is now being quite re-built and will be virtually a new town when it is completed. The area is designed as a series of separate units, and each of these units is to be built round a square with no access for vehicles of any kind. And it is also planned to put shops, restaurants, a post-office and other public services on the site, including a library;

thus the people who live in the flats will have the books literally on their doorstep.

The library consists of a lending library with a small collection of some ten thousand books, and a reading-room for adults. There is a children's library, shaped like a pentagon to make it more interesting for children, and they can not only borrow books and read them on the spot, but they will have a children's librarian to advise them, and they will also be able to do their school homework there. Moreover, in the evening the bookshelves in the children's library can be moved away and the room used as a meeting-hall for the inhabitants of the district.

Parallel to the development of the children's libraries is the growth of school libraries. The old public schools have always had libraries like this one (slide) at Shrewsbury which goes back to the sixteenth century when, as you can see, some of the books were chained to the shelves and with the fronts outwards.

In the light of the great educational developments that have taken place in the United Kingdom, the problem has been how to translate libraries of this kind into modern terms. And of course it is a very hard thing to do, and it has taken some time to realise that the problem is more than one of mere translation.

The universities in Great Britain have been put into a difficult predicament because there has been such an enormous increase in the numbers of their students. Whereas in the nineteen-thirties it was normal for the universities of Liverpool, Manchester, Sheffield and so on to have about 2000 students, the average number at the moment is 5000 and plans are being made to provide for about 7000. This means that library accommodation is far too small. But the importance of university libraries is now being realised in Great Britain. It has been said that you can gauge the success of a university by the quality of its library. As an indication of the time and money spent on modernising libraries in the universities, I can say that new libraries have recently been built, or are being built, at Manchester, Sheffield, Birmingham, Reading, Southampton, Swansea, North Staffordshire, Exeter, Nottingham and Newcastle, while plans are in preparation for new buildings at Glasgow, Edinburgh, Leeds, Liverpool and London, not to mention the library building in the new universities, planned in Brighton, York and Norwich. The university libraries have their own distinct sphere of activity which is the academic, but they have in recent years been ready to put their own special collections at the disposal of specialists outside the university. And in all cases the university libraries have entered into schemes of local co-operation like the one I mentioned at Sheffield, where the university library helps to provide books and information for industry.

As you will see (slide), the Sheffield university library building marks a radical departure from previous practice at Sheffield: the accent is on lightness of structure, ease of access, and lack

of « fuss ». The features that are common to the new university libraries are: 1) catalogues placed in a central hall; 2) special rooms for bibliographical consultation; and 3) considerable decentralisation. Great importance is attached to the supply of current periodicals. Birmingham has an exceptionally good collection, with 15,000 current periodicals in the reading-room.

The problem of providing enough space in libraries is growing bigger year by year, and I do not know how it will be solved. But I feel that the growth of libraries should be controlled; and this is easier now than it has been in the past, because modern means of reproduction make it possible for anyone, anywhere, to have almost any book on his own table at any time. And this of course is one reason why there is no longer the same need as there was for collections to be set up in a great number of separate places. The economic side of the growth of libraries is most important and troublesome, and I think that this sort of control would be possible if the national library is kept as comprehensive as possible.

This brings me to our national library, the British Museum, which is now preparing to adapt itself to the sort of services that I have been describing. The British Museum is just over two hundred years old; the building it occupies at present is more than a century old, and it has found it very difficult to adjust itself to the type of active librarianship I have mentioned. The national library has two purposes: 1) to preserve literature, and 2) to ensure that what is preserved is made readily available to the people who want to use it. The bigger the library, the more difficult it is to find easily what you want. It is imperative that the big libraries adopt measures of decentralisation. This, I hope, we shall do in the new building which is being planned.

A few slides will show you the growth of the present building. As you know, the British Museum is both a museum and a library. It originated in the collection of a wealthy and fashionable eighteenth-century London doctor, Sir Hans Sloane, who amassed a very impressive library of books and prints, volumes of dried plants, antiquities — Greek, Roman, and even Egyptian —, and it is owing to the vast range of his interests that the British Museum is what it is to-day.

The present building is about 150 years old; the contents were moved from their original premises, a seventeenth-century palazzo called Montague House. No great problems of accommodation were encountered until the beginning of the nineteenth century, when, on the death of George III, his library was offered to the British Museum, and acquired in 1823. It consisted of 60,000 volumes, which could not possibly be housed in the old building. A new edifice was therefore put up in neo-Classical style. At its nucleus was a big room designed to accommodate the King's library and nothing else. A cortile was provided for open-air conversation among the visitors. The building is very severe in form, and leaves little room for modi-

fication or expansion. This became a pressing problem after the greatest event in the museum's life: the appointment to the library of an Italian, later known as Sir Anthony Panizzi. He revolutionised the organisation of the museum and made it into a modern institution. He determined to enforce rigid observance of the existing copyright law, whereby British publishers were required to send to the museum copies of all British publications. Enormous problems of storage resulted; these were solved by Panizzi by utilising the garden of the building, and constructing the famous reading-room, finished in 1857. Its success is proved by the fact that it is still a going concern.

Unfortunately the reading-room, though a very effective structure, is by its nature incapable of modification or expansion. And so the library's active function — the approach I mentioned before — is impossible. Panizzi's iron book-stacks have been replaced to make a little more space — but not much.

The museum was damaged in the war: it lost about 1/4 million books through fire and was hit by bombs 5 times.

After the war, the new London plan provided for extension of the museum's library premises; the fine neo-Classical architecture will be displayed in a way it has never been before. We have not yet made complete plans for the new structure, nor have we yet appointed an architect. What we hope to do is to provide a general reading-room, a set of specialised reading-rooms, and an exhibition room, which we have never had before.

This has perhaps been rather a desultory and wandering sort of talk; but I hope that I have given you some idea of some of the things that are happening in the library world in Britain.