

272

American Library Association

Library War Service

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HEADQUARTERS
THE LIBRARY OF CONGRESS
WASHINGTON, D. C.

DISBURSING OFFICER
WILLIAM L. BROWN

Hôtel Crillon,
Paris, June 28th 1918

Dear Doctor Hill :

A lot of water has gone under the bridge since ~~the~~ memorable day last November when I discovered you in that little bedroom on the third floor of the Warner House, trying to extract some hot water from a very reluctant faucet.

I have thought over and over again of writing you, first of how the work ~~is~~ progressing at Camp Sherman, then of the interesting points of our book campaign, for which I did publicity work at Washington during approximately six weeks, and finally of the extremely interesting developments over here. Mrs. Stevenson reminds me this morning that this letter is long overdue and so, having had the extreme good fortune to find a stenographer who can take down my dictation as rapidly as I can fire it at her, I am going to get this duty off my mind.

I feel, you know, that the whole development of this work has for its foundation that one million dollar fund which, in the face of manifold discouragements, your Committee was able to raise last Fall. I know very well how difficult it must have been to awaken public interest and enthusiasm to the point of making cash donations for a project which must have appeared to many more or less chimerical; and that it was finally accomplished was a great surprise to many pessimists, and it is that campaign of course which bound American Public Libraries together in this enterprise.

It seems to me that one of the most important by-products of this whole war work is the consolidating and revivifying of this library interest. I have felt from the first that this library war service was the most important task the public libraries of America had on hand and that librarians must be made to understand that their other work was secondary and subsidiary, and that their first duty was to see that the library service for our men was properly organized and wisely administered. To my mind, no man in the

Dr. F. Hill,
Brookland, N.Y.

June 28th 1918

- 2 -

library profession was too big to take a camp library job, and I am glad to note that this idea is gradually ~~perpetrating~~ ^{percolating} from the profession.

Not, strictly speaking, that I have ever been one of the profession. As you know, my library work previous to about a year ago, was a sort of avocation, a sort of recreation which kept me in touch with books; which seems strange to me sometimes that I should be the man selected to come to France to represent the A.L.A., but I am trying to do it to the best of my ability, and we are, I think, making quite a showing over here. Let me say too that my experience at the Washington Headquarters soon showed me that Dr. Putnam and his assistants were anxious to do everything possible to forward this work, and I soon became a thorough admirer of the energy and wisdom which they were applying to the task. Since I have been over here, I have felt this more and more, and I know that they feel that their supreme task now is to back up this work in France to the limit.

What has been accomplished over here is briefly this :

We have distributed through the Y.M.C.A. from the Paris warehouse more than 34,000 volumes, serving about 203 points; we have persuaded the army to erect for us a warehouse of our own 20 ft. by 100 ft. in size at one of the great receiving depots where we will handle the books that come through on our own cargo shipments. This warehouse is almost complete and these books are beginning to arrive. We have arranged with the Red Cross to permit us to supervise the distribution of the books which come over on their tonnage, and we have also distributed some 5,000 of Nelson fictions to the front line trenches, these books being bought in Paris for the purpose. Some 7,000 volumes of historical and miscellaneous reference books which Dr. Raney purchased in London, on his way back to America, are also beginning to arrive and will be distributed very soon. The Y.M.C.A. has turned over to me the management of their Library Dept. and has placed their Educational Secretaries at my disposal for the forwarding of this work. We are working in very close touch with the Y. Educational Dept. and are just having placed at our disposal magnificent headquarters occupying the entire ground floor of a building which was formerly the palace of the papal délégué to the French Republic. I am planning to set up there a real American public library which will act like a reservoir and central distributing point for the whole of France. What I am trying is to institute in the principal camps a system somewhat similar to that which we started in the camps in America by which the boys may look towards our Paris Headquarters for advice and assistance. Should military developments make it necessary for us to remove from Paris, I will start up a similar collection somewhere else,

Dr. F. Hill
Brookland, N.Y.

274
28 June 1918

- 3 -

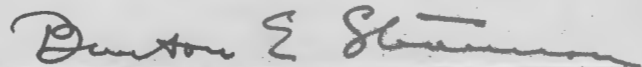
probably at Tours, and I hope by early Fall to have this system in complete operation. It seems to me that one of the greatest services we can perform in France is to demonstrate the way in which American Public libraries work. As you know, there are no free lending libraries, as we understand the term, in France at Present. There is, however, a move on foot to establish them here, organized by a committee of which the President of the Republic is the chairman, and I wish to place the experience and advice of the A.L.A. at the disposal of this committee for the forwarding of this movement. I am enclosing some of the publicity matter which we have used over here from time to time and in which, doubtless, you will be interested. The work is of the most inspiring and interesting kind and the demand for books on the part of our men is almost unbelievably great. Their gratitude for even the smallest collection is very touching and makes me feel that we cannot work hard enough to give them the very best possible service.

Please let me hear from you and believe that we often speak of you, especially when we are coming home from dinner at the Hôtel des Saints-Pères, along a street famous for its shops of curiosities and antiques. Mrs. Stevenson has not yet acquired any, but no doubt she will ultimately yield to the manifold temptations which surround her. If there is anything that you would like in the way of Boule cabinets, let me know - or, better still, come over some time and she will help you pick out one for yourself.

With kind regards from both of us, believe me

Very sincerely yours,

BES/PC



Burton E. STEVENSON
European Representative A. L. A.

Doctor Frank P. Hill,
Librarian
Public Library,
Brookland, N.Y.