

A Note on the Archives of the Baptist Missionary Society.

OWING to many circumstances and not least to the blitz, B.M.S. archives of every description have been urgently awaiting overhaul, repair and classification. It was first of all necessary to gain a rough idea as to the extent of the materials and what proportion of them were of real value. This first survey was done in 1957 and it revealed much in the cellars and lofts of the Society's headquarters and a similar quantity housed elsewhere.

Though pictures and curios have their own importance it was essential, early in 1958, to prepare a preliminary scheme concerning the MSS. and rare books for the purpose of applying to the Pilgrim Trust for assistance. Investigations proceeded for a year or more and the outcome was a scheme acceptable to the Trust and to ourselves. All along the purpose has been to make the materials accessible to those who wished to study them. This involved, among many other items :

- (a) The provision of adequately furnished accommodation for the student or researcher.
- (b) A muniment room, not too far from the research room, fire-proof and ventilated.
- (c) The repair of MSS. to bring them to a condition in which they will stand up to frequent handling.

After considering our scheme the Pilgrim Trust kindly granted £1,500 towards the cost. In addition to this the advice and help of a member of their committee, Mr. F. C. Francis of the British Museum, has been of the greatest value.

An attempt to describe the whole of the work so far done along these lines could be tedious. Sundry practical details, however, may be useful to others and imagination can fill the picture. Many of the archives were found to be moulding from long exposure to slight damp and some were also insect ridden. The cost and practical difficulties of fumigation made this method of treatment rather prohibitive. Instead the system followed has sometimes been along these lines : spread everything to the air, store the papers in tea chests impregnated with Paradichlor benzene where they remain until accommodated on permanent shelving which is being put up. I have repaired a few MSS. myself but it is slow work and help of the highest quality is at present being given by the British Museum.

The less expensive repairs involve the brushing in of size (gelatine) where mould has robbed paper of its texture, and sometimes also

the pasting of Japanese rice paper over one side or over ragged edges. The more expensive call for the use of silk chiffon lisse. There is always something lost in repair and some of these papers are literally dust. Where the document is of special value we first copy the letter longhand using light and magnifier to the full. We then pass them to the Museum experts who float them on to pasted silk. To this they adhere without being touched by the brush. The resultant sandwich between two silks is firm as the strongest paper and the strength of the ink imperceptibly less. The repair by rice paper does weaken the ink a little.

The repair of books has not yet received attention other than that given to some engravings affected by mould. A gentle swabbing with "Chloramine T" two per cent. solution has a magic effect and does no damage. We are greatly indebted to Mr. Rogers of the Victoria & Albert Museum for recommending this and other methods.

Pictures, though not in the scheme for a grant, have been given first aid. There are simple prescriptions which anyone used to genteel work can apply. Common freshening-up preparations should be avoided. The preparation recommended by the Victoria & Albert Museum as least likely to hurt an oil painting is an application of pure white spirit (turps substitute) into which has been melted a little white beeswax. This cleans and does not harden the paint for subsequent treatment. It is applied with cotton wool and interminable, minute circular motions.

The preliminary assembling and classification of the wide variety of MSS. has been one of the main jobs for several years. They are housed in boxes 15in. x 10in. x 4in. The Public Record Office advised Kraft as the material for these boxes which must be stronger than ordinary cardboard; we have proved this advice to be excellent. After papers have been arranged chronologically they are put in boxes duly listed and with information as to contents. At times our task is very akin to detective work. For example, we came across a diary of the Cameroons which contained valuable information but did not bear the author's name. On examination, however, it was found to contain allusions to all the Cameroon personalities save two. From old periodicals it was ascertained that one of these two, Robert Smith, was on deputation work at certain times and in certain places which coincided with entries in the diary and thus enabled us to identify him as author.

There has not been a comprehensive account of the B.M.S. since that of F. A. Cox in 1846. Many splendid items of the Society's history and of certain fields have been put on record but as many and more have never been brought to light. Some of these are coming to light—not all. There have been great missionaries and fields of labour of whom we know too little and have few or no

original letters. Incidentally students from the world over always ask for original correspondence. It furnishes best proof of a condition at a given time. I have seen the non-Christian student spellbound by this. The fact is that a history of even texture cannot be produced until the materials are assembled. There is much work yet to be done. Keen volunteers who can give time to it are welcome to assist. The muniment room proceeds apace. Alterations have been made to the library so that a research student may shortly work in it. Much has to be done in other ways, for example, the filming of MSS. here and elsewhere so that complete sequences can be viewed wherever the originals may be.

A system of archive filing should finally materialise whereby, progressively, every bit of good material, much from older living missionaries, will find its place. Missionary periodicals have told part of the story only. Many of our valued documents have come from relatives of missionaries who sent in papers they had thought to burn. When our house is in order we hope to receive all such. It needs to be emphasised, as the Pilgrim Trust made very clear, that the plan must not be to pickle and fix some loved letters of long ago but to maintain a growing record.

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