

Cooperation: An Historical Review and a Forecast*

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A DISTINGUISHED characteristic of modern librarianship is that if it is practiced well and efficiently it must be cooperative. Gabriel Naudé, one of the first to make librarianship a career, at least in the period of the printed book, recognized and stated this fundamental necessity in his book, "Avis pour dresser une bibliothèque" first published in 1627. Naudé's fourth principle goes in part like this, ". . . that by this means (a catalogue) one may sometimes serve and please a friend when one cannot provide him the work he requires, by directing him to the place where he may find a copy as may be easily done with the assistance of these catalogs."¹

This principle, reflecting the instinctive desire of the true librarian to bring book and reader together, wherever the two may be, is at the root of all modern librarianship. We like to think, and I believe the facts substantiate the thought, that it is in America, a land that was largely an untrammelled wilderness when Naudé was formulating his ideas on the organization of libraries, that this root principle has come to its fullest, if not complete, fruition.

In 1853, less than one hundred years after the attainment of independence by our country, clouds of a possible civil war were hanging heavily over the land. Nevertheless those concerned with the production

and use of books were increasingly feeling the need of working together and sharing common problems. A call consequently went out for a conference to be held in New York City. That the need was real is shown by the attendance of eighty-two delegates from a dozen states. Among them was young William F. Poole, whose "Index to Periodicals" was first issued that year. From Yale came Daniel G. Gilman, Assistant Librarian, and from the new Smithsonian Institution, Librarian Charles C. Jewett.

Poole's Index, the forerunner of many periodical indexes, was to grow into a notable example of early cooperative effort among librarians to be eventually replaced through sheer need and the quickening tempo of research and publishing, by various and increasingly specialized indexes. Jewett had, as early as 1850, set forth a plan for the formation of a general printed catalog of American Libraries "looking toward the accomplishment of that cherished dream of scholars, a universal catalog."² In making this proposal, clearly based on Naudé's fourth principle, he realized the necessity of securing the close cooperation of the libraries of the country and the introduction of uniform cataloging procedures. He foresaw in such cooperation "an aggregate economy," a practical motivating force which has given impetus to library cooperation throughout the years.

The war came, as wars so frequently

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¹ Naudé, Gabriel. *Advice on Establishing a Library*. Berkeley, University of California Press, 1950, p. 12.

² Jewett, Charles C. *Report of the Assistant Secretary in Charge of the Smithsonian Institution for the Year 1850*. Senate Miscellaneous Documents, No. 1, Special Session, March 1851, pp. 28-41.

have, to the detriment of libraries and other intellectual enterprises, and for some years the times were not propitious for further organized efforts among persons concerned with bookish things. By 1876 the nation's most critical war wounds were healing rapidly, and librarians and bibliographers were again sensing the compulsions of meeting their common problems together. The historic conference which we honor and celebrate at this convention was an almost inevitable result. Among the men who gathered in Philadelphia in 1876 to lay the foundation stones of the American Library Association came again William F. Poole, now Librarian of the recently founded Chicago Public Library. His library, although only four years old, already contained 48,100 volumes and was growing at the rate of 11,000 per year. Justin Winsor, who came from the Boston Public Library to be elected first president of the Association, was in charge of a collection of approximately 300,000 volumes, growing at the rate of 18,000 volumes per year. He was soon to leave this larger library for the Librarianship of Harvard College, which in 1875 had 154,000 volumes in its Library and was increasing at the rate of 7,000 volumes per year. In addition there were, on the Harvard campus at that time, thirteen other libraries containing 73,650 volumes.

These lusty and rapidly growing libraries, typical of the vigorous intellectual stirrings of 1876, were harbingers of things to come but it is doubtful that even Mr. Winsor foresaw that within seventy-five years Harvard would have over 5,000,000 volumes in its libraries, that it would be adding more books in a single year than were then contained in the entire library, and that the maintenance and increase of these large book collections would cost well over one and one-half million dollars annually. Nor

is it likely that Mr. Poole envisioned the growth of his young library, within the same time span to 2,200,000 volumes, housed in numerous branches, sub branches and stations, and spending half a million dollars annually for new materials. Neither is it probable that either man foresaw the sheer magnitude of the problems of bibliographical control which those who were to come after them would so soon have to face. One thing, however, that these two pioneers in librarianship and those who foregathered with them were keenly aware of was that the problems that faced them would be solved through cooperation.

It is to this will to work together, so much in evidence at this first conference, that we in America owe much of our rapid progress and development in library matters, and similarly it is the lack of such cooperative spirit that has made library development more difficult in some other countries. Margaret J. Bates has a statement indicative of this, in the *Library Journal* of a few years ago, when, in comparing the libraries of Brazil with those of the United States, she says, "I feel that the fundamental difference is a lack of cooperation in Brazilian libraries which often leads to clashes of personalities, with serious consequences."³

A recent discerning foreign interpretation of the nature and need of cooperation among libraries comes from Mr. Kanamori of the National Diet Library of Japan. In the first issue of *Biblos*, published by his library he says:

When I listened to the lectures in the United States I often heard the words 'democracy' and 'cooperation.' Cooperation means to serve others not losing one's own personal standing. I was attracted more by the word 'cooperation' than by 'democracy.' If you abandon yourself completely it is not cooperation; if you rival with another it is not cooperation either. When I think that the real democracy

³ *Library Journal*, 70:667, August 1945.

exists in the respect of one's own self and of others, and in the mutual help, I may safely conclude that cooperation is the most important element in democracy.⁴

Helen Haines, who has for many years been a practitioner of librarianship and who "has been an ornament thereto," recognizes the special place of cooperation in library affairs in this recent statement: "Cooperation and fellowship are still the forces that give unity to the great complex library structure of today. They make the bond of personal relationship that I think is stronger than in any other professional calling (except, perhaps, the Army); a relationship that is more diffused now than in the past, but is still pervasive and adhesive."⁵

Much of the early work of the American Library Association, illustrative of the foregoing quotations, necessarily had to be concerned with such details as card size, cataloging rules and the standardizing of supplies, forms, and furniture. These things were primary, but within the next thirty years there was envisioned, in the papers and proceedings of the Association, I think without exception, all the major concepts and ideas around which our struggle for mastery of the records of mankind now revolves. Central cataloging, including printed cards, cooperative indexing of periodicals, union catalogs showing the location of books and journals, reservoir or deposit libraries, cooperative buying of books, bibliographic centers, regional libraries, these were all foreseen, advocated, and discussed.

Among those who saw the pattern of things to come, and who did much to help it take shape, was E. C. Richardson, of Princeton, and later of the Library of Congress. In 1899 in one of his earliest publications he declared that some method

whereby the location of books in various libraries could be found was needed. He emphasized also the need of cooperation in buying in order that libraries would supplement, not duplicate, each other and in order too that as great a number of books as possible not already somewhere in this country would be acquired.⁶ Richardson gave a lifetime of effort to this basic concept. In its behalf his voice was raised, and effectively raised, again and again, in library counsels, and he lived to see real progress made, on a national scale, in book location if not in book acquisition.

In 1908 two ideas, which will be central to library work for hundreds of years to come, were advanced. Charles H. Gould, Librarian of McGill University proposed in that year the establishment of regional libraries, whose spheres of operation would embrace the entire continent, each to be the center of a great region, helping the libraries of its own district, but maintaining a definite cooperative relationship to all other regional libraries. He thought of these libraries as really international in scope and character.⁷

In 1908 W. C. Lane of Harvard brought forward the plan, earlier conceived in part by President Eliot, of the cooperation of libraries for central storage and emphasized the difficulty of knowing where books are located. He suggested setting up a College Library and Lending Bureau to gather bibliographies, catalogs, and other kinds of data on where books are located. He also suggested production of union lists on a variety of subjects and the building up by the Bureau of a collection of books of its own, chiefly working tools and expensive individual works and sets.⁸

⁴ Richardson, Ernest C. "Cooperation in Lending among College and Reference Libraries," *Library Journal*, 24:22-26, May 1899.

⁵ Gould, Charles H. "Regional Libraries," *Library Journal*, 33:218-19, June 1908.

⁶ Lane, William C. "A Central Bureau of Information and Loan Collection for College Libraries," *Library Journal*, 33:429-33, November 1908.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 76:500, March 15, 1951.

⁵ From a talk "Through Time's Bifocals," at a dinner celebrating the completion of the 2nd edition of her *Living with Books*. As quoted *Library of Congress "Information Bulletin,"* January 15, 1951, p. 2.

These proposals for coordination were not advanced as a spot solution of the problems of scholarly libraries, easily to be arrived at. The difficulties of putting them into effect, and the time and effort required were clearly foreseen. Thus in 1909 Gould, who that year made cooperation the theme of his presidency of the A.L.A., said, in his presidential address, "The twentieth century has the task of evolving method and order *among* rather than *within* libraries."⁹ Speaking on coordination at the 1909 conference R. R. Bowker, in similar vein, said, "It is an enormous subject this; it is really the subject of the century. . . ."¹⁰

Now, as we meet at mid-century, it is appropriate that we measure and evaluate what progress has been made with this enormous subject, this subject of the century. One thing that seems clear from all our cooperative efforts is that they have chiefly been devoted to things which have helped each library to operate more economically and efficiently in building itself into as complete and extensive a library, according to institutional needs, as funds and circumstances have permitted. While we have worked together, it has, institution-wise, been for individualistic ends. All our cooperative cataloging, all our union lists and catalogs, and bibliographic centers, even cooperative storage of books, all have contributed to the efforts of each library to grow in size, grandeur and research status, to become, all by itself, a proud mecca of the scholarly world.

We have only to look at the size of our libraries and the implications of their growth rates to bring home these facts. When I entered the library profession a quarter of a century ago the Library of Congress had 3,420,000 volumes and pam-

phlets, exclusive of a million pieces of music, and numerous other materials. Now it has well over 9,000,000 volumes and pamphlets and is adding 3,000,000 more each decade. Harvard University had in its libraries a quarter of a century ago something less than 2,500,000 volumes. Now it has more than 5,000,000 volumes and is growing at the rate of 1,600,000 volumes per decade. When the centennial anniversary of the A.L.A. is observed the Library of Congress will, at its present rate of growth, have over 16,000,000 volumes and Harvard will be well on its way to 9,000,000 volumes. By the end of this century, if the present growth rates continue, the Library of Congress will have 23,000,000 volumes and Harvard will have more than 12,000,000. By the year 2,100, a lesser distance into the future than the beginning of Harvard University is into the past, the Library of Congress will have grown to 53,000,000 volumes and Harvard to 24,000,000 volumes. By the year 3,000, no farther into the future than the Norman invasion is into the past, the Library of Congress will, by present counts and standards, have 323,000,000 volumes, and Harvard will have 170,000,000, requiring respectively 8,750 and 4,600 linear miles of shelving. The present few hundred miles of books in these two libraries will then be a small part indeed of their total holdings.

These figures, for two of our greatest libraries, are symptomatic only and will, if things bibliographical continue as they are in the present era, be duplicated in varying degree by numerous other libraries, endowed and state supported. Even the culturally young State of Oregon, with a population of only one and one-half millions, now has in the libraries of its state supported institutions of higher learning more than 850,000 volumes. These are modest figures, in comparison to the two

⁹ Gould, Charles H. "Coordination. or Method in Cooperation," *A.L.A. Bulletin*, 3:122-28, September 1909.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 3:156, September 1909.

large libraries used illustratively above, but by 1976 the Oregon libraries will, at their present rate of increase of 324,000 volumes per decade, have doubled their volume content and contain approximately 1,600,000 volumes. At the century's end they will contain about 2,700,000 volumes, and by the year 3,000 they will have reached 32,400,000. Books enough, and more than enough, it would seem, for one commonwealth to gather in support of research and the higher education of its youth.

During my quarter of a century in librarianship there have been a good many predictions of the suffocation of mankind in his intellectual excreta, some fanciful, but all certainly, as the foregoing growth prospects emphasize, having a sound basis in fact. Many of us, as we have read or heard these predictions have thought of them as something in the far distant future with which neither we nor our children's children need have undue concern. Unfortunately, the fecundity of the human mind and the efficiency of our printing presses does not permit any such comfortable passing of the problem to the future. The time of beginning suffocation, at least quantitatively and financially, is here and now. This is shown clearly in the never ending quest of our great libraries, and indeed of all our libraries, for more and more miles of shelving. It is evident too in the financial gaspings of our libraries.

Keyes Metcalf of Harvard is one of those who have pointed up the problem in a number of places. In a recent issue of *College and Research Libraries* he says:

The gravity of the situation in many universities can be described bluntly: If libraries continue to grow as in the past, and if we have a reasonably stable economy and income, one or more professors will have to be dropped each year in order to keep the library going. This is certainly intolerable and cannot be defended if we are now spending

enough for our libraries. We must decide what percentage of total expenditures the library should take and try to stick to that figure. We shall have to find a way out of our dilemma.¹¹

Unfortunately, from the standpoint of checking growth rate, not even an unstable economy has had a seriously retarding effect. At the beginning of my quarter century in library work our country and the world was just recovering from the greatest war in all history. Early in my career we and the world were plunged into the most severe economic depression that has ever been experienced, to be followed by a second World War which in destructiveness, viciousness, and costs in blood, sweat, tears, and money dwarfed the first. Yet it has been precisely in this period of strife and turmoil and uncertainty that our libraries have made such phenomenal growth, resulting in a doubling, or more than a doubling, of their resources.

If the growth of the libraries of our larger universities is now choking off one professor per year and somewhat less in the universities not so large, how many will be choked off when these libraries contain the 9,000,000 volumes that Harvard will have by 1976, or its 12,000,000 volumes by the end of this century, or the 24,000,000 volumes of the year 2100, or the 170,000,000 volumes on 4,600 miles of shelves in the year 3,000? Mathematically this situation has within itself the solution of the problem. Every professor choked off will mean a few less monographs and less journal articles too until the situation finally comes into natural balance. A predictive law or formula can no doubt be devised which will show, on a definite mathematical basis, more and more librarians and bibliographers in proportion to professors, until finally, perhaps, by the

¹¹ Metcalf, Keyes D. "A Proposal for a Northeastern Regional Library," *College and Research Libraries*, 11: 238, July 1950.

year three or four thousand, all the intellectual workers will be librarians and none will be professors.

When this point is reached suffocation will be complete and the growth problem will have been solved since the librarians themselves will be so busy tending their numerous holdings that they will not, as does our present generation, have time to themselves add extensively to the writings on their endless shelves. Such an absurdity will, of course, never be reached as long as man continues to justify the name of *homo sapiens*. There will be common sense and wit enough to constructively solve the dilemma. In considerable part this may well be done along the lines suggested at the turn of the present century by the leading librarians then active.

The deposit storage library, once hopefully looked to, is, of course, no solution at all as it merely complicates matters by physical location of the books owned by a library in some distant building. The subject specialization of libraries, arranged locally and regionally, and to which some conferences were devoted in World War II and the pre-world war period, has offered only scanty relief, since areas of specialization have not, in general, been clearly delimited or closely adhered to.

The plan to get into the libraries of this country one copy of every book published abroad, first suggested and actively promoted by E. C. Richardson, and now known as and going forward as the Farmington plan, works both ways. By promoting specialization it spreads the burden and volume growth somewhat among libraries. To the extent that it does this effectively it increases the unique title count of our libraries. The national library resources in the aggregate thereby become more complete, and if the libraries with Farmington specialties should rigidly forego acquisition

in their non-subject specialties there would be a true spreading of the burden. Up to the moment, however, it seems quite certain that the libraries participating in the Farmington plan are not refraining from acquisition in those subject areas allocated to other libraries. They are probably, to a considerable extent, pursuing their Farmington specialties *in addition* to the regular selection and buying programs which are piling their resources up into such fantastic volume counts.

Bibliographical centers and union catalogs, arrived at by so much cooperative effort and planning, are no help either in solving the growth problems of our libraries. They do, of course, to the credit of modern librarianship, make our libraries and the book apparatus of the world generally much more useful and efficient by telling us quickly, although expensively, where the books are. The efforts toward international bibliographic control that have been struggled with unsuccessfully but valiantly for the past fifty years and more are an extension of the union catalog principle to all literature. This control problem, which is now occupying UNESCO so extensively, did not yield when the mass of material to be recorded was much less than it is now and it does not, in spite of united, cooperative attack, yield readily now. The best minds of the bibliographical world have thus far made discouragingly little progress in overcoming barriers of language, custom, vested bibliographical priorities and practices and nationalistic pride. Success of these sincere and painstaking efforts toward cooperation and progress will, to the extent that it is achieved, only aggravate the growth problems of our libraries, since the better the controls the larger the number of publications which we will learn of and which we will, by present standards, feel that we should have in our libraries.

The organizational mastery of our written records through the miracles of electronics, which gives bright promise of success, while it may and probably will make our libraries more efficient will certainly do little to overcome the suffocating effects of the rabbit-like multiplication of the world's written records. Through rapid selectors and similar gadgets we may be able to quickly place before a scholar all the literature pertinent to a subject. The coding of such materials, taking the place of our present alphabetical subject controls, will require ever more careful, expert study and analysis on the part of the catalogers, indexers, and bibliographers. Again the result will inevitably be that more and more of the intellectual workers in a field will be busy keeping track of the records and fewer and fewer with productive scholarship. Here too a definite formula may be possible to calculate the time when the literature is so massive that everyone will be busy taking care of it, and no one will have time to produce it.

Only in the idea of regional libraries, put forward by Gould early in this century does there seem to be growth relief for the individual library. We do now have, here in the great heartland of America, an embryonic regional library, and another such library for the Northeastern States is in the talking and planning stage. The plans afoot for the Midwest Inter-Library Center require, for the first time in American Librarianship, that each of the cooperating libraries shall, in the words of Mr. Kanamori, abandon a little of itself to a central agency. This will be done by releasing title to materials, painstakingly and expensively gathered and organized, and sending them to the Center. Important and different in this plan is the fact that the Center will, contrary to the New England deposit library, dispose of duplicate sets of little used

materials. Important in the proposed program of the Center and also new in the area of cooperative effort, are the plans of the Center for a positive acquisition program of its own to round out incomplete sets and materials.¹² An important and logical corollary to this program will be, if the plan is to make sense, that the extensive duplicative efforts among the cooperating libraries will cease.

A number of electronic devices already exist through which the image of the printed or written page can be transmitted at tremendous speeds. As the great promise of these gadgets is realized, more and more of the multi-million volumes which are considered essential for advanced study and for research can be in a central library such as the Midwest Inter-Library Center. If this assumption is correct then more and more of the fantastic volume increase of the records of mankind will be found in regional, or perhaps national libraries, of which the Midwest Center is a progenitor. Less and less books will be required on campuses or in special institutional libraries. This will mean that our university libraries, Harvard, Yale, Illinois, Columbia, California and hundreds more, can, by abandoning to the Center more and more of themselves and, more significantly, their active acquisition programs, meet the need of the scholar and graduate student of their institutions with campus libraries of a few hundred thousand volumes, or at the most, a million volumes. Nor is it rash to assume that they will meet them better and more completely than they now do with their multi-millioned libraries.

The ultimate logic of the regional or national library idea, dictated by the economy and efficiency, will shift the burden of maintaining libraries of ten or fifteen or five

¹² Esterquest, Ralph T. "Progress Report on the Midwest Inter-Library Center," *College and Research Libraries*, 12:67-70, January 1951.

hundred million volumes from numerous institutional libraries to a few cooperative super libraries. The student or scholar at the smallest cooperating institution will then have at his command the same bibliographical resources as the student or scholar of the largest one. Many libraries can then reverse their volume counts and announce, with the same satisfaction that we now annually note the increase of our libraries, a decrease and further shifting of resources from the campus to a center.

Few of us now active, including this writer, will welcome this merging of the distinctive contributions, strength and individuality of our libraries into such a common Center. It may be safely predicted that some generations of librarians, and of deans, presidents, trustees, legislators, governors, and alumni too, will need to fade away before these things come to complete fruition. The sheer mass of the writings of mankind, reflected by the quantitative growth prospects facing our libraries, under present standards and methods of operation dictates, nevertheless, that some kind of centralization of book resources shall come to pass, however painfully.

One facet of the amazing growth of our writings which we of this generation have brushed but lightly and which the learned world of the future, in its entirety, will have to come seriously to grips with, is ways and means of discarding and sloughing off those writings which no longer have relevance and value to present or future generations. We of the current era still stand somewhat in awe of our writings. In spite of the vast number of volumes in our libraries we still consider the printed page as something sacred deserving to be preserved somewhere. The feeling and philosophy that everything written should come into our libraries and be there preserved has been at the central core of our twentieth century

librarianship. It is evident in the all inclusive canons of selection of our larger libraries, in our papers read at conventions, in our annual reports, and in our concern to preserve, in a region or in the nation, at least one copy of every book. Future generations faced with central libraries of hundreds of millions of volumes will increasingly and necessarily lay a heavy hand, not only on current prints, but on much that has gone before.

Wholesale discarding of printed materials, finally and irrevocably, is now the rankest kind of bibliographical heresy. Imagine, however, the librarians of the year 3000, when the Library of Congress will by present standards have over three hundred million volumes on 8,750 miles of shelving. Should these future librarians have let their libraries accumulate to this extent, which they will not if they are wise, may they not conclude in desperation that of the small segment of 240 miles of books added to the Library of Congress in the ancient years up to 1950, 200 miles can be safely discarded and that of the 1,000 miles plus of volumes added in the period 1950-2100, even if they are present in micro-reduction, the equivalent of 800 miles can be discarded?

Without some such extensive elimination of books, which like corals have lived for awhile, served their purpose and then been absorbed into the foundation of future growth, civilization will indeed be in danger of intellectual suffocation. This is not at all a problem of the physical size of books or miles of shelving but of the capacity of the collective human mind, and we must assume that long before the year 3000 birth control will be in universal and successful application, to use more than a portion of the record. Numerous publications standing on the shelves of our libraries today could immediately disappear into final and complete oblivion without any appreciable loss

to society. As our writings multiply and fructify this will be increasingly true.

I predict that by the year 2000, which a good many here will live to see, serious and strenuous efforts to permanently and finally discard many publications will be under way, and that the librarians then active will not worry about retaining a last copy somewhere. A Shaw list of books that no longer deserve to live and to be accorded housing and organization, or only organization, if housing is no longer an obstacle, may well be undertaken by some group of librarians not too far removed from the present. If so their task will be infinitely more difficult and complex than our present relatively unquestioning pack-rat emphasis on getting all the books published into libraries somewhere. Not too far into the future, possibly in the lifetime of persons here present, some courageous librarian will, I believe, set up a discarding division in his library, equal in staff and financial support to the acquisitions division.

A good many efforts to foresee the bibliographical future are now included among the numerous materials in our libraries. Some of these have been amusing, imaginative and provocative,¹³ some constructive and balanced,¹⁴ and some half-baked and lacking in perception.¹⁵ My own thought is that whatever miracles come to pass through electronics, the current working library of the future will revolve around some form of the codex book which has been in use the past 500 years. Supplementing and aiding codex books and journals, attractively produced and easily holdable in the hand, will be millions upon millions of relatively little

used volumes, carefully weeded and, no doubt, micro-reduced.

By the year 3000 our books may well be recorded in some simple universal language. They will more and more, particularly in technical and scientific fields, be written by teams of project or research workers, without individual authors, along the pattern beginning to emerge in World War II. Most of the untold millions of micro-reduced publications, will be available in a few great national and world libraries, in which and through which the significant writings of the world will be indexed, abstracted, and coded along universally agreed upon principles. A much larger percentage of the intellectual workers of the world than is now needed will be required to keep this vast bibliographical apparatus streamlined and functioning easily. High among the responsibilities of these workers will be careful selection and discarding of unessential and trivial materials. Then as now, the literature of the world pertinent to any subject or any phase of it will be readily placed before the productive scholar or government or international worker or advanced student.

These things can come into being only through an extension of the will to work cooperatively together, so prevalent among the founders of the A.L.A. and in our present generation. When and if they occur the fourth principle set forth by Naudé in the ancient year of 1627, although probably only faintly discernible among all the machinery and gadgets, will still govern. In these distant times librarians and bibliographers will still, by these means, the books and catalogs at their disposal, however produced and organized, seek to serve and please a friend by directing him to the works he requires.

¹³ Hardin, Garrett. "The Last Canute," *Scientific Monthly*, 72:203-08, September 1946.

¹⁴ Silver, H. M. "Books in Cans and Envelopes," *Pacific Spectator*, 4:404-10, Autumn 1950.

¹⁵ Walker, Fred L. Jr. "Blue Print for Knowledge," *Scientific Monthly*, 72:90-101, February 1951.