The Bergen Public Library.¹

THE Public Libraries of Scandinavia have received but scant attention at the hands of the editors of *Minerva*, and the contributors of the elaborate article on "Libraries" in the current issue of the *Encyclopædia Britannica*, if the University and Royal Libraries are excepted; and the Public Library at Bergen is left out in the cold.

In his useful contribution on "The Public Libraries of the Northern States of Europe," read at the recent International Library Conference in London, Mr. Steenberg dismissed the Bergen Public Library with a notice extending to about a hundred words only. This was disappointing to me as I had personally visited it a few years before and thereby acquired some knowledge of its history and methods, which has been supplemented from time to time by correspondence with the lady librarian, and studying the publications which have emanated from that Norwegian library.

The Bergen Public Library, or to give its proper designation "Bergens Offentlige Bibliotek," is the largest municipal free public library in Scandinavia, and now comprises about 75,000 vols., and was founded in 1872 with 14,000 vols. This collection of valuable books had been formed by Botten-Hansen, the University librarian, who died in 1869. They were acquired for the sum of 12,800 Kroner, over £700, or about a shilling per volume, which sum was raised by private subscription among the inhabitants of Bergen. The first contributor was Consul Chr. Börs, who had for many years been Norwegian-Swedish Consul in New York. He had learned to recognise the great value of free public libraries during his residence in the United States, and being desirous that the same advantages should be offered his fellow countrymen as to the Americans he offered in advance about £222: nearly one-third of the amount required to secure this library for Bergen. In 1872 the municipality accepted this handsome gift and undertook to house and maintain it. The

¹ Read at the Twentieth Annual Meeting of the Library Association, London, October, 1897.

library is at present located in a centrally-situated building which belongs to the town. It occupies the upper storey, and the meat shambles and some shops are on the ground floor. Two additional rooms have recently been provided, but the accommodation is inadequate and unsuitable in several respects. The library furniture is of a very substantial character. It is made of deal painted a light colour. The book-racks are heavy in appearance; and the shelves fixed, thick, and long. It is to be hoped that the municipality will ere long realise the importance and necessity of erecting a separate and detached building for its public library. It was not, however, until 1873 that a librarian and an assistant were appointed: and the following year (February 2nd, 1874), that the collection was made available for public use.

During the first five years (1874—1879) the governing body of Bergen supported the library in a sparing manner from the common funds at their command.

The library is managed by a committee which is constituted by the municipality of Bergen. The body now consists of five elected members, and, be it specially noted, of the librarian, who is a permanent member of the committee, with all the rights pertaining to that position. The present librarian is a lady. Miss Valborg Platou has occupied that position during the last fifteen years. Having visited Bergen a few years ago (in 1891) and spent some time there with my erstwhile colleague, Mr. Dickinson, of West Bromwich, I can thoroughly testify that she is a librarian who thoroughly realizes the responsibilities of her honourable office, and is increasingly desirous of developing the Institution over which she so graciously presides. This accomplished lady has three assistants, of which one is a lady. The librarian devotes between six and seven hours per day to her library duties and now receives 2,400K. per annum (about £134). The first assistant, a gentleman with twenty-three years' service, with five and a half to six hours' duties daily gets 1,600K. (£89). He has to add to his income by bookbinding and repairing. The recently appointed second assistant with six hours' per day receives 1,000K., or £56. The lady assistant, who spends five-and-a-half hours per day in the library, with seven years' service, receives a salary of 400K., or about £22 a year; and the woman caretaker and messenger, who works nearly six hours a day, is compensated by a salary of 500K. a year, or about £28.

The liquor traffic in Norway is worked on the Gothenburg system. From the proceeds of this trade the licensed society

for the sale of alcoholic liquors (the Braendevins Samlag), made their first annual grant in 1880 for the purchase and binding of books for this library. The income from this source was only 1,000K. This was quadrupled the next year, increased in 1886 to 5,000K., and in 1893 to 6,000K. From 1880 to 1895, this body of traders in intoxicants has granted 117,000K. (of which 37,000K. is an Endowment Fund), to the Bergen Free Public Library. The income of this Licensed Corporation having considerably decreased during the last two years, the grant was reduced by 1,000K. in 1896-7.

For the last nine years there has been another source of income for the provision and binding of literature, the Directors of the Savings Bank voting 1,000K. a year to the augmentation of the library, as is done in Denmark.

Since 1880 the municipal body has contributed nothing to augment the stock of books in its popular library, but it has defrayed all the establishment expenses since it accepted the Botten-Hansen collection. This year's income for this purpose from that source will be about 7,000K., and the cost of printing a supplementary catalogue (800K.) will be defrayed by the rate-payers as well. No special library rate has ever been levied at Bergen.

The stock of books numbers about 75,000 volumes, of which 16,700 are duplicates. It is divided into 10 classes. These are:—

	Vols.
(1) Theology and Ecclesiastical History ...	7,000
(2) Philosophy and Education	2,700
(3) Fiction, Poetry, and the Drama... ..	18,760
(4) Philology	2,800
(5) Geography, Travels, and Statistical Works	7,200
(6) History, Biography, and Literary History	13,500
(7) Jurisprudence, Politics and Sociology ...	3,000
(8) Science, Commerce, &c.	4,400
(9) Complete Author's Works of all classes, and Periodical and Miscellaneous Literature	13,000
(10) Bibliography	300

About 3,000 unbound volumes are not included in this classification.

The number of books in foreign languages and the proportion of works in English in this library is as follows:—

Theology, &c.,*	1,288 vols....	English ...	120 vols.
Philosophy, &c.,*	893 ..		57 ..
Fiction, &c.*...	6,570 ..		1,980 ..
Philology, &c.*	1,511 ..		142 ..
Geography, &c.*	2,284 ..		256 ..
History, &c.*	4,720 ..		525 ..
Jurisprudence*	518 ..		41 ..
Science, &c.*	1,473 ..		59 ..
Sets of Works*	4,699 ..		845 ..
Bibliography*	153 ..		10 ..

* Duplicates not counted. There are 7,881 works of fiction in Norwegian-Danish.

In all there are 4,290 vols. in English. English authors hold the first place in the translated fiction. Among those who cannot read English the following British authors are the most popular:—Thackeray, Dickens, Scott, Cooper, "Geo. Eliot," and Marryat.

These statistics of the number of books in classes have been compiled for this paper.

English being taught to boys and girls in the higher grades in the popular schools, there is consequently a demand and a supply of works in our mother tongue, several thousands having been acquired. The greatest part are well selected works of fiction. These circulate to a larger extent than those in any other foreign language. This is the proportion, taking the issue of 1896 as a basis:—

English	...	...	1,384
German	...	...	1,269
French	...	...	773
Swedish	...	...	456

The most popular authors in English are Scott, Marryat, Dickens, and Cooper; and in Norwegian, Bjornson, Lie, and Ibsen.

Will my library *confrères* send some English books for use by our kin across the sea—either direct, or through me? I have practised what I ask of you, and will send more books.

It may be interesting to note the character of the reading of the Norwegians. In Theology there is more than 5 per cent. of the total issues, in Philosophy about two-thirds per cent. of

Fiction 72, of History and Biography 7 per cent., of Philology and of Jurisprudence, $\frac{1}{2}$ per cent. each, Travels, &c., $6\frac{1}{2}$ per cent., of Science, $1\frac{1}{2}$ per cent., and of Miscellaneous about 6 per cent. More than 10 per cent. of works issued for home reading during 1896 were in foreign languages. Notwithstanding the restricted hours, last year's issues were 48,029 volumes, of which 6,919 were read in the reading-room. During the last 10 years the issues have increased by nearly 16,000 volumes.

The privilege or right of borrowing is confined to adults, but the youth of both sexes borrow books for their own reading with their parents' and other cards.

The library is open for the issue of books from 12 to 1 and from 5 to 7 every week-day, the reading-room being opened at the same time as the library, but being available for one hour longer in the afternoon and in the evening. It is a pity that such a large collection is not accessible to the citizens during the greater part of the day, instead of from three to five hours. This extension would tend to still further popularise the library, and the expense of remunerating the staff for additional time would be trifling, compared with the advantages which the public would gain by the extension of hours.

The weeklies and monthlies in English provided in the reading room are:—The *Illustrated London News*, *Punch*, *Review of Reviews*, *Windsor Magazine*, and *Harper's Monthly*. No one under the age of fifteen years is admitted to the reading-room. There is no news room provided.

The catalogues published, and still in print, are six in number, and a new supplement is in the press. These were issued in 1875, 1877, 1881, 1887, 1888, and 1892 respectively. They are demy in size, printed across the pages in brevier type, and are classified. Of these published catalogues three have been compiled by Miss Valborg Platou, the librarian, whose presence I hope we may have at the next annual meeting of the Library Association.

J. POTTER BRISCOE.