Correspondence.

THE RATING OF FREE PUBLIC LIBRARIES.

Free Public Library, Wimbledon, January 23rd, 1889.

THE question whether a Free Public Library should be assessed to local rates, or not, has probably engaged the attention of many of your readers before, but, so far as I can ascertain, it has not yet been definitely answered.

It is only common sense to assume that an institution supported by a rate, which is, in many cases, insufficient for its maintenance, and which is expended directly for the benefit of the ratepayers, should be exempted from the payment of all rates and taxes.

The Wimbledon Free Library Committee, believing that they complied with the requirements of the Act 6 and 7 Vic. cap. 36. (*An Act to exempt from County, Borough, Parochial and other Local Rates, Land and Buildings occupied by Scientific or Literary Societies*), applied for, secured the certificate of exemption, and sent in their claim for exemption to the assessment committee.

A member of the library committee (an able barrister) attended the assessment committee, and succeeded in convincing them that the library was a literary institution, but objection was taken to the librarian's residence on the premises, which they contended constituted a beneficial occupation, and to this extent therefore made the library rateable. This was replied to by sending in cases which clearly proved, that such residence, being for carrying into effect the purposes of the institution, would not invalidate the claim for exemption.

The clerk to the assessment committee finally advised the committee, "that the Wimbledon Free Library is not such an institution as is described by the Act, and the fact that the committee purchase newspapers and periodicals is sufficient to make the claim invalid."

The library committee on hearing of this decision, decided to take the opinion of an eminent Q.C. on the subject, and there the matter rests for the present.

The editor of the *Surrey Comet*, in consequence of our action, and for the purpose of writing an article, since published, issued circulars to all the librarians of Free Libraries in England, asking the following questions—

- (1) Is your library assessed to local rates?
- (2) Have your committee applied for exemption?
- (3) Does the librarian, or caretaker, as the case may be, live on the premises?

By the courtesy of the editor, I have been permitted to take a list of these replies: summarised they are as follows—

50 Free Public Libraries are not assessed to local rates, and in 24 of these the librarians or caretakers live upon the premises.

49 Free Public Libraries are assessed to local rates, and in 7 cases the committees have applied for exemption and have not been successful.

Apparently no committee has carried a case to Quarter Sessions, and consequently we have no precedent to support us.

If any of your readers happen to know of any such case, I would be grateful if they would acquaint me of it, and for any other information likely to be useful.

THOMAS H. RABBITT,
Librarian and Secretary.

[This is a most important question for Free Libraries, and we trust that those interested will take it up and not let it rest until it has been finally decided in favour of the libraries. ED.]