The Constitution of Colonial Public Libraries.¹

THE Constitution of the Public Libraries of the United Kingdom having repeatedly occupied the attention of the Members of the Association, a few remarks upon the Public Libraries of Greater Britain may possibly prove of interest, as showing with what public-spirited action the establishment and maintenance of such institutions has been taken up in various parts of the Empire. The constitutions of the Public Libraries in the Colonies differ in many respects from those of the Mother Country as well as amongst themselves, and I shall endeavour to point out the recent progress made in library administration in the Colonies, explaining briefly the basis upon which Public Libraries have been established, whether supported by state grants, by rates as in the United Kingdom, or by voluntary contributions or endowments, and to give a short account of their present position.

In no part of the Empire has the Public Library question been taken up with greater enthusiasm than in the Australasian Colonies, where in almost every town worthy of the name, a Library is to be found either wholly or partially supported by State funds, ranging from a few pounds to several hundreds, those in the capital cities being known as Public Libraries, whilst those in the smaller towns are known as Schools of Art, Mechanics' Institutes, &c. The Free Public Libraries in Melbourne, Sydney and Adelaide are important and imposing Institutions, the first named comparing favourably with many of the Public Libraries of both the European capitals and the chief cities of the United States. According to the most recent statistics the following table shows the number of Libraries in Australasia (with the exception of Western Australia, from which Colony no numerical returns have been received) supported by State funds, together with the total number of volumes as regards each Colony:—

¹ Read before the Belfast Meeting of the Library Association, September, 1894.

	No. of Libraries.			No. of Books.		
Victoria	...	380	...	...	722,282	
New South Wales	...	199	...	...	326,517	
South Australia	...	139	...	...	154,337	
Queensland	...	87	...	...	113,680	
Tasmania	...	39	...	...	69,339	
New Zealand	...	298	...	...	330,770	
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Total of six Colonies ...	1,142	...	...	1,716,925		

Coming now to the details of the separate Colonies, New South Wales as being the Mother Colony claims first attention. The Free Public Library of Sydney was established in 1869, when the books, numbering 16,000, and the building of the Australian Subscription Library were purchased by the Government, the books thus acquired forming the nucleus of the present Library, which, according to the latest statistics, contains 97,348 volumes, including those in a lending branch or lent to country libraries, and embracing one of the most complete collections of works upon Australasia in existence, which has been rendered accessible by means of an excellent catalogue, recently published under the somewhat misleading title of an "Australasian Bibliography," compiled by Mr. R. C. Walker. An important department of the Library is the lending branch, a system having been introduced by which country Libraries and Mechanics' Institutes may obtain, on loan, works of a select kind which in many instances would be too expensive for them to purchase on account of the limited funds at their disposal. This system enables the Sydney Public Library to make up boxes containing from 60 to 100 books, which are forwarded to the country libraries on application, to be returned or exchanged within four months. So successful has this system proved that during last year 130 boxes, containing 10,141 volumes, were forwarded to 80 institutions, many of them being at considerable distances from the Metropolis. All charges in connection with the despatch and return of books, insurance, &c., are defrayed by the State, and the system generally is stated to be the most liberal of its kind in existence. The Library is supported entirely by the Government of the Colony, it being free to the public in every sense of the word. It forms a separate department under the control of the Minister of Public Instruction, and its cost to the State has already been £59,185, exclusive of salaries and maintenance, which last year amounted to £4,208. The popularity of the

Library is undoubted, the number of readers during last year having been 173,205. It is open on Sundays (in addition to week days) from 2 till 6 o'clock, and in 1892 was visited during those hours by about 8,000 persons. In addition to the Sydney Public Library there are smaller libraries in the other principal population centres throughout the Colony which may be classed under two heads, viz., Schools of Art, receiving an annual subvention in proportion to the amount of monetary support accorded by the public, and Free Libraries established in connection with municipalities. Under the provisions of the Municipalities Act of 1867, any Municipality may establish and maintain a Free Library, and when such is done the Council of the Municipality is entitled, for the purchase of books, to the sum of £200 if the Library is available for the use of a population of one thousand, or £100 when the population to whom the Library would be accessible reaches 300 persons, the remainder of their income being raised by the subscriptions of members, &c. The number of volumes in the various Public Libraries, exclusive of the Sydney Free Public Library, is estimated at about 240,000.

Victoria.—In Victoria is to be found one of the noblest Institutions of its kind in the whole of Australasia. The Melbourne Public Library was established in the year 1853, and sprang from the zeal for education that actuated the community. But behind every public sentiment that assumes activity there must be a man to give it shape. In Victoria that man was Sir Redmond Barry, whose work in connection with the Public Library question is well known to many of the members of the Library Association. At a time when nothing of the kind existed, and Melbourne contained a numerous working population, Sir Redmond Barry, in true kindness of spirit, opened a small lending library in his back kitchen, with a spare room fitted up as a reading room, one of his servants, in addition to other miscellaneous duties, performing those of librarian. Out of this humble commencement sprang the Melbourne Public Library, which at the present time contains over 300,000 volumes, pamphlets and parts, the building having cost from first to last £185,203, and is still unfinished. This large sum has been provided entirely by the Government, together with further monies, amounting, with the above-mentioned sum, to half a million sterling, of which about £30,000 was received by the trustees during last year. The Library is open to the public without payment of any kind on week days from 10 a.m. to 10 p.m., and is visited annually by

about 400,000 persons. During the year 1892 a Lending Branch was established, the books being lent out for fourteen days to any person who is a ratepayer in any municipality in the Colony, or to any person who is not a ratepayer on providing a guarantee signed by two ratepayers. The advantages of the Lending Branch have been freely availed of, the number of borrowers for one year after the branch was opened having been 8,000. In most of the suburban and country towns of Victoria there are Free Libraries, Athenæums, or Scientific, Literary, or Mechanics' Institutes, some of which receive books on loan from the Melbourne Public Library. Their incomes are derived partly from Government grants and partly from private individuals, the total receipts in 1892 having amounted to £60,000.

South Australia.—The Act incorporating the Free Public Library of South Australia was passed on February 28, 1884, and came into operation on July 1 of that year, when the South Australian Institute, which was its immediate predecessor, ceased to exist. In accordance with the terms of the Act the Library is vested in a Board of sixteen members, eight elected by the Governor, and eight by various public bodies named in the Act. The Library is open free to the public under similar conditions to those in force in New South Wales and Victoria, and contains about 33,000 volumes. It is well supported by the Government, and is housed in a very fine building. In almost every town of note there are Mechanics' Institutes and Libraries, over which the Government exercises a certain amount of supervision, the majority receiving a Government grant according to the financial position of each.

Queensland.—The Public Library movement has not made such progress in Queensland as in those Colonies already referred to, but recent events seem to point to increased interest being now taken in the question. There is no so-called Free Public Library in Queensland at present, but throughout the Colony there are eighty-seven institutions, comprising Schools of Art, Mechanics' Institutes, and Miners' Institutes, possessing a total of 114,000 volumes, of which 19,000 are to be found in the Brisbane School of Art, and having an aggregate of 7,061 subscribers. These are supported by private subscriptions, and a Government grant at the rate of £1 for every similar amount raised by subscriptions to the extent of £200. The Government grant for last year amounted to £2,553, whilst the Government have already contributed a total out of State funds of £74,796.

Western Australia.—In Western Australia there is an excellent Public Library, which was established at Perth in 1887, in commemoration of the Queen's Jubilee, and is now in a flourishing condition. It contains nearly 6,000 bound volumes, in addition to a large number of unbound volumes, consisting chiefly of Government publications, pamphlets and periodicals. It was visited by some 30,000 persons during 1893-94, and received a parliamentary grant of £1,000. The Library is open on Sundays, and larger premises are already required in order to keep pace with the progress of the Colony and its growing requirements. There are also several Mechanics' Institutes which are allowed a small annual grant for their upkeep by the Government in all the principal towns of the Colony. These are well supplied with both books and newspapers. Members who wish to make use of the Circulating Libraries in connection with these Institutes pay a small annual subscription, but all visitors are allowed free use of the periodical literature.

Tasmania.—The Tasmanian Public Library was established in 1870, the idea of such an Institution having originated with Sir William Denison, who, when governor in 1849, placed a sum of £100 on the estimates for the purchase of books, which sum was augmented by private subscriptions. In 1854 the annual grant was increased to £200 by the Legislature, with £200 more on condition that an equal sum was raised by subscriptions and the Library thrown open to the public. During a period of depression in the Colony, however, in 1866, the Government grant ceased altogether, which necessitated closing the institution. Four years later arrangements were made for the City Corporation to take charge of the institution, and the books which had been stored since the failure of the previous institution were removed to a handsome suite of rooms adjoining the Town Hall and now known as the Tasmanian Public Library. This library was opened free to the public in the year 1870, and contrary to the custom of the other Australian colonies, is partly supported, as in the United Kingdom, by rates, the corporation of Hobart setting apart funds representing a rate of one penny in the pound on the annual value of property within the city boundaries for its maintenance, and receiving also a Government grant-in-aid of £200 a year. The annual expenditure by the City Council on the library is over £400 a year, which, with the charge on the citizens of at least £200 a year for interest on the

amount expended on the buildings, represents an aggregate sum of about £12,000 expended since 1873 out of the rates paid by the citizens for the maintenance of the Library in the chief town of the Colony. During the same period the Government grant has never been more than £200 a year, and that amount only during the last seven years; the aggregate sum raised having been £2,200, against £12,000 expended by the city, so that the trustees are perfectly justified in giving expression to their opinions upon the subject when they state that "the library has never received at the hands of the State the support which in every other Australian Colony has been extended as a matter of course to the National Library." The library contains, at the present time, about 13,000 volumes, and is open on all days of the year from 10 a.m. to 9.30 p.m., excepting Sunday, Christmas Day and Good Friday, when it is open from 2 till 6 in the afternoon.

The largest Public Library in the Colony is to be found in Launceston, which was founded under the title of the Mechanics' Institute in 1842, and now possesses commodious premises and a collection of 18,000 volumes. It is supported by annual subscriptions from members augmented by a Government grant of £50. There are, in addition, twenty-four libraries scattered throughout the Colony, possessing 40,000 volumes and receiving subscriptions to the amount of £1,208, together with Government grants amounting to £700 allocated at the rate of 13s. 4d. in the £ on local contributions.

New Zealand.—In New Zealand the Public Library movement has not been taken up with the same amount of spirit that has characterised it in the Australian Colonies; but there are, nevertheless, several important institutions possessing valuable collections, and taken advantage of by a large number of readers. Chief amongst these is the Auckland Free Public Library, situated in the North Island, and destined to be the greatest of the public libraries in New Zealand. Formerly known as the Mechanics' Institute and Library, this institution was originally established in 1843, and filled the place of a public library until 1880, when the provisions of the Public Libraries Act were adopted and the Provincial Council Library was amalgamated with that of the Mechanics' Institute, and formed the nucleus of the present library, the management of which is vested in the hands of a Committee of the City Council, with the mayor as president. It is supported by a halfpenny rate, which now pro-

duces between £600 and £700, and receives in addition a small Government grant. The library is open every day in the year, except Christmas Day and Good Friday, the hours for opening on Sundays being from 2 till 9.30 p.m. Amongst the regulations in force for its general management is one stating that a lavatory is provided, and requesting readers to use it, so as to prevent, as far as possible, the soiling of the books by dirty hands—a request that might with advantage be posted up in many of the public libraries of the United Kingdom. Starting with a collection of about 5,000 volumes, the library now contains 27,000 volumes, and is rapidly increasing. One of the chief attractions of the Auckland Public Library is the valuable collection of works presented by Sir George Grey—whose name is associated with the Public Library movement in every country in which he has resided—amongst which are several early MSS., a considerable number of Caxtons, and early printed works, a large number of State Papers, and a series of draft despatches to Foreign Ambassadors, written by Thurlow, and corrected in some cases by Oliver Cromwell's own hand. There are, in addition to the Auckland Library, several other Public Libraries and Museums, and Mechanics' Institutes supported by annual subscriptions, together with a Government grant, the following table showing the number in each province, as well as the number of subscribers and volumes :—

	Institutes.	Members.	Volumes.
Auckland	71	2,791	73,086
Taranaki	5	348	5,378
Hawkes Bay	21	1,314	18,710
Wellington	22	1,515	31,682
Marlborough	5	234	5,868
Nelson	29	1,009	28,578
Westland	6	238	5,283
Canterbury	66	3,263	79,774
Otago	73	3,777	82,411
Total	298	14,489	330,770

Canada.—There are comparatively few Public Libraries in the Dominion of Canada, though attention is now being generally directed to the necessity of establishing them in centres of population. This is the more surprising in view of the magnificent example set by the United States, where some

of the finest Public Libraries in the world are to be seen, which have cost enormous sums of money to establish and maintain. Still, with the exception of the Public Libraries of Toronto, Hamilton and Guelph there are no public institutions of any importance in any other of the towns of the Dominion. There are of course the Legislative Libraries containing in some instances vast and valuable collections, but of these I do not intend to speak, although they are public inasmuch as citizens can consult them by obtaining tickets from the Speakers of the different legislatures. Regarding the Toronto Public Library, an Act was passed in 1882 by the Ontario Legislature to provide for the establishment of Free Libraries in the Province. According to this Act a petition may be presented by not less than 100 electors in cities, and from ten to thirty in other municipalities, praying the Council to take measures set forth in the Act to establish a Free Library. For the purpose of providing for the expenses necessary for carrying out the Act, a municipal assessment is made annually upon all rateable, real and personal property not exceeding one half of a mill on the dollar. Free Library Debentures may be issued by the Council, on the requisition of the Board of Management, in order to purchase and erect the necessary buildings, and obtain books and other things required. Since the passage of this Act the Toronto Public Library has been established, and is managed by an energetic committee, the members of which appear determined to make it the most representative and national library in the Dominion. It has numerous branches scattered throughout the Province, and in order that the difficulty in the way of providing large numbers of books for them may be obviated, a special telephonic system connecting all the branches and centering in the main building has been adopted, by which readers at any of the branches can consult catalogues and have every facility for selecting from the same large collection of books as readers at the Central Library. Deliveries and returns are made every day by a special conveyance. Steps are being taken by the Board of Management to secure for the library every work of any importance bearing upon the history and literature of Canada. If continued persistently by those in charge of the library this policy must ensure success, and result in the Toronto Public Library being at no distant date in possession of a Canadian section unsurpassed by any other library in the Dominion. It at present contains about 75,000 volumes. The Hamilton

Public Library is also an institution worthy of the name, possessing a handsome and imposing building, and being in every way well suited for the purpose for which it was built. Its constitution is similar to that of the Toronto Public Library, and it has 17,000 volumes, including a valuable collection of technological works, in fact it has been officially stated that in that particular branch it possesses a better selection than many libraries in cities much larger than Hamilton.

Cape Colony.—There are many libraries of considerable importance in the South African Colonies, chief amongst them being the South African Public Library at Capetown, which was established by a Government proclamation in 1818, and for the purpose of its maintenance it was enacted that every cask of wine passing through the Capetown market should be subject to a certain charge. This wine tax was repealed in 1828, when the Government withdrew its contribution towards the institution, it being almost exclusively supported by private subscriptions up to the year 1862, from which time it has received an annual Parliamentary Grant of £600, together with a special annual Grant ranging from £500 to £1,000. It contains about 52,000 volumes embracing every branch of science and literature. It also possesses three special collections, viz., the Dessinian, the Grey and the Porter collections. The first consists mainly of books with a few MSS. and paintings bequeathed to the Colony in 1761 by Mr. Joachim Van Dessin, the number of volumes being about 4,000, in the Latin, French, German and Dutch languages; the second, viz., the Grey collection, has attained a world-wide notoriety and forms the most valuable part of the South African Public Library. It consists of about 5,000 volumes together with many valuable MSS., mostly on vellum or parchment, some of them being of the tenth century. This special collection was presented to the library by the venerable statesman Sir George Grey, who is now visiting the old country after an absence of many years. The third special collection, that known as the Porter, consists of standard works purchased out of the funds raised for the purpose of perpetuating the memory of the Hon. William Porter, a prominent Cape politician. The library is open every day from 9 a.m. to 4.30 p.m. during the winter months, and from 9 a.m. to 6 p.m. during the summer months, and every evening from 7 till 10 o'clock. Subscribers only are allowed to take out books. By an Act which has recently been passed the management of the Institution is vested in a Board of Trustees

consisting of the Mayor of Capetown and the Vice-Chancellor of the University, four Government nominees, and four members elected by the subscribers, of whom there are now 410. There are also five other libraries receiving special Government grants and enjoying similar privileges to the library at Capetown, viz., those of Grahamstown, Kimberley, King Williamstown, Port Elizabeth and East London, which possess collectively 68,000 volumes and have 1,500 subscribers. During last year 72 public libraries in the smaller towns rendered returns showing a total of 140,000 volumes with 3,700 subscribers. The following regulations have been framed for the management of public libraries as approved by the Cape Parliament :—

(1) That the Government annual grant shall not exceed the annual average amount raised by subscriptions and donations during the three preceding years, or, in the case of new libraries, shall not exceed the amount of subscriptions and donations received for the first year, or average for two years, but in no case to be more than £100 per annum, provided that these grants shall be made out of the moneys voted annually by Parliament for the purpose.

(2) That no aid shall be given when the aforesaid contributions do not exceed £25.

(3) That whenever the library is open, the public be admitted free, and allowed access to all works of reference, and to all books and periodicals in the library. Access to newspapers shall be under such conditions as each library committee may determine.

(4) That a report be presented to the Government annually, showing the amount raised by subscriptions during the year, and generally, the state of the finances of the institution, the circulation of books and the number and description of those purchased, acquired, or sold during the year.

Not Rateable.—By Act 19 of 1892, all lands and buildings, or such portions thereof as are exclusively appropriated to the purposes of, and used as, public libraries or museums of natural history or fine arts within the Colony, are exempted from the payment of municipal rates and taxes.

Natal.—The want of public libraries in Natal is much felt, there being no public institution of any extent or importance in the Colony. At the same time there are several semi-public societies situated in the principal towns. In Pietermaritzburg, the chief town of the Colony, there was formerly a Mechanics'

Institute, which was established in 1851, which is now known as the Natal Society. It is managed by a committee and has a reading-room attached, which is open to the public every day from 9.30 a.m. to 10 p.m. It contains 8,500 volumes, and last year had a daily attendance of 300 persons, and an annual issue of 22,995 volumes, and 14,366 magazines. It is supported by private subscriptions and a Government as well as a Corporation grant. In Durban, the chief seaport of the Colony, there is a public library supported in a similar manner to the Natal Society, but receiving a larger Government grant, viz., £100 a year. There are also ten smaller institutions scattered throughout the Colony, which are supported by private subscriptions and Government grants ranging from £10 to £50, but in no instance can Natal compare, as regards its literary institutions, with those of the Cape Colony.

West Indies.—In the West Indies the Public Library movement has been taken up with very little spirit, no doubt to some extent attributable to the depressed state of the sugar market during recent years. But there are exceptions, and in Jamaica, Trinidad, Barbados, and the Bahamas, are to be found institutions which supply in an admirable manner the wants of the public as regards current literature, although not Public Libraries in the strict sense of the word. In Jamaica the Public Library is attached to the Institute of Jamaica, which was constituted during the governorship of Sir Anthony Musgrave, by Law 22 of 1879, which created a Board, styled the Board of Governors of the Institute of Jamaica, consisting of seven members (increased by Law 34 of 1889 to eleven) appointed by the Governor, their duties being to establish and maintain an institution comprising a Library, Reading Room and Museum. This law transferred to the Institute the Libraries of the House of Assembly and the old Legislative Council, both of which ceased to exist in the year 1866, together with a suitable building. The Library, which provides a Public Reading Room, is supported by a Government grant and private subscriptions, and contains about 9,000 volumes of scientific, historic, and general literature, in addition to a special collection of works on Jamaica and the West Indies generally. The Library is open every week day from 11 a.m. to 9 p.m. With a view to enabling those at a distance from Kingston to participate in the use of the Library, various branches have from time to time been formed, but of these only one—that of Lucea—is now in existence, and to it are sent such books as can be allowed to leave the Library.

The Public Library of Trinidad is an important institution containing 18,000 volumes, and is under the control of a committee of management consisting of sixteen members, six being nominated by the Governor, eight elected, and two nominated by the Borough Council. It was established in 1851 during the administration of Lord Harris, who endowed it with an annual grant of £300, in addition to which there is an annual subscription of 12s. a year. It has 400 subscribers, and is open from 8 a.m. to 9 p.m.

The Public Library at Nassau in the Bahamas receives an annual Government grant, and contains about 12,000 admirably selected volumes.

In Mauritius, Ceylon, the Straits Settlements, British Guiana, and other equally important Colonies, there are various societies possessing in some instances valuable collections of works, but their constitution differs entirely from that of the Libraries of which I have treated, and cannot be classed as Public Libraries, their collections being available to subscribers only, by whom they are wholly supported.

In conclusion it only remains for me to say that in this brief paper I have endeavoured to place before you an account of the constitution and present position of the Public Libraries of the British Empire beyond the seas, which in many instances compare so favourably with some of the principal Public Libraries of the United Kingdom, and are additional instances of the energy and ability displayed by representatives of the British race in all parts of the world.

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