LIBRARY CHRONICLE.

American and British Libraries.—Fytte 2.

THE following appears in the *Library Journal* for March, 1894 :—
“We should be loath to add to international polemics by treating otherwise than good-naturedly the further comments and criticisms of our recent visitor, Mr. Brown, nor did we intend, in our comment upon his original article to do other than ‘speak up’ for American libraries in fair counter to some of his conclusions. We will therefore only disclaim on the part of Americans ‘contemptuous reference’ to European libraries ; nor will we comment on the tone of his reply, except to say that doubtless Americans as well as English are prone to generalise from hasty information, and to draw conclusions which might not be confirmed by a more full acquaintance with facts. We can scarcely let the matter pass, however, without entering friendly protest against Mr. Brown’s method of comparison of figures of libraries. Witness his first citation : ‘In Boston, during the year 1890-91 (I have no later figures), the total use of the libraries amounted to 1,715,860, made up of 1,367,924 book issues and 347,936 visits ; total cost, £33,426, or 4½d. per head of users. In Manchester, during 1891-92, the total use amounted to 4,718,986, made up of 1,654,568 book issues and 3,064,936 visits ; total cost about £13,000 or one half-penny per head of users. Boston use per head of population is 3·80 ; Manchester 9.’ This is only another illustration of how figures can mislead. Deducting reference room figures which the ‘news room’ use in England, owing to the difference of custom in America and England regarding newspapers, makes unfair, we have, by testing the reports of 1891 for these two libraries, the following figures :—Circulation : Manchester, 702,000 ; Boston, 1,715,000. Number of books in library :—Manchester, 206,000 ; Boston, 576,000. Number of books purchased :—Manchester, 6,400 ; Boston, 25,000. Now, applying Mr. Brown’s method of deducing results, let us see what these figures show :—Percentage cost per book circulated, Manchester, 9·5 ; Boston, 9·2 ; percentage cost per book cared for, Manchester, 3·1 ; Boston, 2·7 ; percentage cost per book purchased, Manchester, 10 ; Boston, 6·6. Who shall say which figures are correct ? Who shall say that either library is badly managed ? As a matter of fact we believe both are admirably administered. These differences could be multiplied to an unlimited degree, but these are sufficient to question the usefulness of such comparisons. No conclusions can be drawn from such comparative library figures, because the conditions are so dissimilar as to make any such tests radically unfair. Indeed, they are as misleading generally as the few users of American libraries in the deserted months of July and August were to Mr. Brown. As for the vaunted Americans contributions to library science, of which Mr. Brown demands a list, we may have over-estimated them. But we had supposed the modern card-catalogue, the dictionary catalogue, the Library Association, modern library architecture, periodical indexes, library schools, branch library systems, free book deliveries, access to shelves, the Rudolph indexer, the linotype permanent catalogue, the revolving book-shelf, and a few minor improvements, had

been important contributions to modern libraries, and had helped to make possible the present library development the world over. And in making this claim there is no wish to depreciate, as Mr. Brown evidently believes, either European libraries or librarians. What is claimed is that America, practically without libraries 50 years ago, has, from that very poverty been compelled to cope with difficulties unknown in Europe, and has done this so successfully that to-day it has not merely developed a great library system and constituency, but has helped to waken European libraries from their sleep of many years, and given them an impetus that is among our proudest achievements. If they are now surpassing us, so much the better. We shall as thankfully accept developments and improvements from them as they have from us. We are not competing in enmity. We are all the same brotherhood, eager only to make libraries as great a need and aid to the public as may be. Every European improvement on American ideas will be welcomed. We will revolutionize our methods, if we are but shown how. Give us something better, in kindness or in criticism, and we will adopt it."

MR. BROWN'S REPLY.

I have no captious desire to say the last word on the comparative merits of British and American libraries and methods, but should like a small space in which to make a few friendly remarks on the courteous article above quoted. I share the writer's views as to the ease with which figures can mislead, and must congratulate him on the brilliant illustration he has given us of how they can be made to do so. The Manchester "circulation" of books in 1891 is stated at 702,000 per annum, as against my figure of 1,654,568 [1890-91 was 1,509,124]. This smaller total is evidently arrived at by taking the "home use" totals alone for 1890-91, and it does not, therefore, represent all the *books* actually issued for home-reading and those read on the premises. On the other hand, the Boston total of 1,715,860 includes 347,936 "numbers of periodicals passed . . . over the delivery desks of the Central Library," making the actual book issues of Boston, both for "home" and "hall" use, 1,367,924, as I have previously stated. Now, I want to know why the books read in the reference libraries of Manchester should be considered unworthy to rank in a comparison with those of Boston, whatever "difference of custom" may exist. It seems a very extraordinary thing to take the *whole* of the work done in one year at Boston, and contrast it with the work of only one department at Manchester. The actual home-reading of Manchester in 1891-92 was 761,500 vols. [1890-91 702,000], and in 1892-93 it reached 872,655 vols. In Boston the total "home" use in 1892 was 719,464, and the "hall" use, in the Bates central and branch libraries, 648,460 vols. Adding the 347,936 "periodicals passed over the delivery desks," we get the total of 1,715,860 on which the American writer bases his conclusions. When I state that the "hall" use at Manchester, excluding parts of current periodicals and newspapers, amounted to 893,058 in the year I first quoted; that the home use was 761,500, making the actual *book* issues 1,654,568; and that on top of all this 3,000,000 visits were made for the purpose of reading magazines and newspapers, it will be seen that the *Library Journal* statistician has given his case away by sheer inaccuracy. But, why, on the other hand, should the work of our newsrooms be discounted? Surely, if only because of their enormous *clientèle*, they must be doing good work, and reaching a class of reader left untouched by both lending library, reference library and magazine or reading room? Again, my contention was, and is, that the volume of work accomplished by British libraries is much in excess of that of American libraries, while the comparative cost is very much

less. On such a basis, is it to be imagined that the newsroom work at Manchester, which absorbs a considerable amount of the working expenses, ought to be ignored because not represented at Boston, when the question is entirely one of the amount of work actually done for a certain expenditure? This is simply lugging in the matter of comparative quality, which forms no part of the question at issue. If the Manchester libraries are used on an aggregate 5,073,825 times in 1892-93, and organise lectures besides, for a total expenditure of £15,941, it is perfectly fair to claim that they are doing much more work for much less money than Boston with (in 1892) an aggregate use of 1,715,860 and an expenditure of over £33,426. It is begging the question to regard it from any other standpoint. As a minor matter, it may be noted that Manchester, in 1891, employed 86 of a staff (excluding cleaners), while in Boston the staff numbers over 150. I shall waste no more time on comparative statistics, as it is quite evident that something in the rate of exchange exists which leads to extraordinary differences in the valuation of work.

Personally, I am only too grateful for the stimulus which has come from the United States in many matters pertaining to library work, to haggle over the appraisal of the services which American librarians have rendered by their energetic methods. We followed them in the good example of forming a Library Association, which has done wonders in the development of the "public library" side of our work; we adopted with enthusiasm the labours of the late Dr. Poole and the present Mr. Fletcher; and we have even considered, without occidental suggestion, huge projects like universal catalogues of literature. But we did not follow as regards card and dictionary catalogues, branch libraries, access to shelves, library architecture, and book deliveries. On the contrary, if we did not lead, we pointed the way, and the American knack of turning everything to the best commercial purpose, and the advantage they had of profiting from the lessons of old-world experience, did the rest. The card-catalogue has been more generally used in the United States than elsewhere, but what is it after all but an "adaptation from the French"? It may interest American Librarians to know that card catalogues were used in the Bibliothèque Nationale more than 130 years ago; in Trinity College, Dublin, over 60 years ago, and even in the Bank of England 42 years ago, for indexing purposes. Where, then, the novelty? As a matter of opinion, I consider the card and sheaf systems of Bonnange (France), and Staderini and Sacconi (Italy), superior to any of the elaborate cabinet outfits yet devised by American ingenuity. That is, of course, on the score principally of public utility and ease in manipulation. Was the dictionary catalogue an original contribution to the machinery of librarianship, or only a mere development of older European plans? I believe it was the latter, and have no hesitation in saying that it was evolved from the dictionary indexes which used of old (80 years ago and more) to accompany most British classed library catalogues. The Americans come in more as the users and developers of the amended plan, and as those who were quick to apply the system to free public library catalogues, than as originators. Private munificence has done nearly everything in America for the employment of architects, and the erection of many decidedly pretty and picturesque library buildings; but neither private nor public intervention have established a single principle in the planning and fitting of libraries which has not been pondered over and over again by European librarians and architects. And what is more to the point, American librarians have learned nothing from their superior experience which is of general application. I make a present to the United States of the "Library School" idea with all my heart. May its operations not in course of time flood the universal globe and librarianship with a "monstrous regiment of women," which neithe

trumpet-blasts nor acts of legislature will ever keep in check! The branch library system was at work in Manchester before Boston had well got its central library squarely into order, for in 1857 the Hulme and Ancoats branches were established, two years after the main Boston Public Library was started for lending. It was not till November, 1870, that the East Boston branch library was established, being the first, as far as I am aware in America. Before that date many branch libraries had been opened in England.¹ The free book deliveries claimed are, I assume, the Chicago, Boston, Jersey City and Baltimore delivery stations, which, by the way, have not been welcomed with universal enthusiasm even by American librarians. And what are they after all, but a variation of Samuel Brown's itinerating libraries which flourished in East Lothian in Scotland for many years early in this century? The reason why such stations have not been established in England is because, as compared with branches, they are not considered sufficiently convenient for the public, in towns. I may be allowed to point out that the Yorkshire Union of Mechanics' Institutions has had, for many years, a delivery system somewhat similar to the American ones, and it is likely the plan will in time extend to counties for which it seems best suited. Somewhere about 1725, Allan Ramsay, a Scots poet, established in Edinburgh a circulating library, to the shelves of which the readers had open access. Since then, every proprietary library, society library and mechanics' institute has allowed direct access with more or less freedom. In Cambridge Public Library the practice dates from 1858; and the British Museum and Patent Office, London, furnish examples of unrestricted access to shelves probably unequalled anywhere outside the Australian colonies. The practice is one of very long standing in Britain, and though far from general in public libraries will probably be extended to most of them in the course of a few years. The Rudolph indexer is the invention of a native of *Germany*. Apart from that, the idea of a panoramic catalogue is at least of ten years' standing in England; while Mr. Rudolph's indebtedness to the late M. Jacquard, of Lyons, for the mechanical part of his machine is quite evident. But why claim a cataloguing method of such very recent introduction, which most practical Americans shake their heads over? The linotype permanent catalogue in its present state of development is a thing rather to avoid, but we are obliged to the Americans for experimenting with it. Finally, I am informed that the revolving book-case was originally the subject of an English patent, but that it was first successfully introduced on a commercial basis in the States.² After all, what are any of these appliances or developments of practice compared to the great British democratic library, established by the people, managed by the people and used by the people, which is the real parent of modern librarianship? If anything has tended to influence the progress of the modern library and its work, it has been the spectacle presented only in Britain, of poor communities cheerfully taxing themselves to establish libraries, and in hundreds of cases fighting strenuously in the cause, as if contending for a mighty privilege.

When everything is said that can be said on either side, the fact remains that both Britain and the United States have much to learn from each other. Then, on the other hand, each has much to teach its own people, and I can instance the enormous amount of missionary work

¹ The Liverpool branches date from 1853.

² The Patent of Benjamin Crosby, bookseller, London, is dated 1808, No. 3153. In some respects it is superior to the so-called "American" revolving case.—ED.

required in the southern states of America, and the needs of our own rural population, as cases in point. It is certain that both British and American librarians stand in sore need of greater instruction in what has taken place and is being done in each country, and as a practical way to that end, I suggest that the 1895 conferences be held at some convenient point in England, when an opportunity can be given British Librarians to show their work, and for American librarians to expound their views. In the past each association has been so engrossed in its own work and in the contemplation of results, that too little heed has been given to the progress achieved by other nationalities, so that the danger arises of both becoming so puffed up with conceit as to emulate the little boy who thought to teach his granny how to suck eggs. The mere exchange of journals and reports is not enough to help on the work of mutual advantage. We want to see the American librarians and hear them in private, as well as through the unconvincing channel of print, or when charged with oratory. Let them, therefore, come over in 1895, as it is easier and pleasanter for them than for us, to undertake the journey, and we can assure them of cool weather and a warm welcome. In conclusion, I can only hope that none of my remarks have jarred the feelings of anyone, American or British. On the contrary, I trust my jottings will even prove acceptable to many Americans, if only for the novelty they present of being a trifle more honest than the foolish statements of the passing unprofessional stranger, who is so prone to see for the first time abroad, the very institution to which he lives next door at home. Nothing, I am sure, would please British librarians more than a thorough scrutiny of their libraries and methods by a competent American librarian, who could be candid without being unfair; and who took the trouble to look into the historical aspect of matters, as well as at their mere present-day surface appearance.

JAMES D. BROWN.

Record of Bibliography and Library Literature.

Voyage d'un livre à travers la Bibliothèque Nationale. Par Henri Beraldi. Extrait du journal *La Nature*, Paris, G. Masson, éditeur, 1893, 4to, pp. 45. Only 95 copies printed.

The brief account of the working of the Bibliothèque Nationale here, reprinted from *La Nature*, is written with M. Beraldi's accustomed charm of style, and is full of interesting information. A book may arrive at the Bibliothèque, as at the British Museum, by one of three different ways: (1) presentation, (2) purchase, (3) legal enactment—"dépôt légal." According to M. Beraldi, the French library is more enterprising than its English rival in the matter of soliciting donations, provoking them "avec une séduction infinie" by means of letters "which the sirens would not disavow." In point of numbers, however, the nett result of its efforts is not very great, M. Beraldi stating it as from 2,500 to 3,500 "articles," against 3,914 received by the Museum in this way in 1891. Perhaps, however, M. Léopold Delisle's little notes may have been rewarded by a difference in value, to which statistics cannot do justice. By purchase, the Bibliothèque acquires annually about 4,500 articles, a very good return for the miserable 70,000 francs (£2,800) placed at its disposal. The Museum, in 1891, purchased no less than 18,618 separate works, or more than four times as many. When we come to books received under the Copyright Acts in the two countries it