An Interesting Development in Public Library Work : Bulletins.¹

IN glancing through the pages of the numerous publications of the Library Association, nothing is more remarkable than the number of papers dealing with the important subject of Catalogues and Cataloguing ; it is, undoubtedly, a matter of perennial interest, and one need make no apology for introducing it in a new light.

I can scarcely expect to convince you that the printed catalogue, as it is now issued, is doomed ; and that a cheaper, more useful, and handier form is gradually superseding it ; but you will readily admit, I think, that unless a library has an almost unlimited income it is a huge mistake to cripple the resources of an institution by expending large sums of money upon the printing of a catalogue which is certain to be incomplete a few months after it has been issued to the public.

"A printed catalogue," says that bright American journal—*Public Libraries*—"is not a necessity" ; and Mr. Fletcher in his ably written volume on *Public Libraries in America* is equally emphatic when he says—"Printed Catalogues have nearly had their day. Formerly no library was thought well equipped which had not issued one. But when it was found how rapidly supplements must be issued to keep up with new books, and how soon the printed catalogue became a 'back number' ; and when the usefulness of such a catalogue was weighed against its cost, serious doubts arose as to the value of this system. The more common practice now," he continues, "is to maintain good written catalogues kept well up to date, and to issue occasionally, temporary and cheaply made lists of new books, or of works in special classes."

In America the system of issuing periodical lists has been extensively adopted ; and there are evidences of its popularity in this country.

Periodical guides, judging from those which will be noticed

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

presently, are intended to supply the public with all sorts of information likely to make the library popular and of value to the community in which it is situated. To the literary Librarian especially the work of issuing such guides should be attractive. The main object of the periodical guide, however, is to keep the public acquainted with the most recent additions to the library.

The credit of introducing the periodical guide or bulletin into the service of the library must be given to our American friends.

By the kindness of Mr. Brett, of the Cleveland Public Library, and Miss Ahern, the editor of *Public Libraries*, a journal which can be strongly recommended to English librarians, I have been able to examine a few of the best American guides; and with your permission I purpose describing a few interesting features in the publications of Mr. Brett.

I have examined some thirty or forty numbers of Mr. Brett's periodical, which is called *The Open Shelf*, and have selected for notice Nos. 1, 2, and 9. Each is neatly printed on paper of excellent quality. The periodical is issued in a handy form, and is sold for 1 cent. monthly.

No. 1 gives useful information upon the organisation of the library; a well executed view of the library building; a classified list of books added to the library during the month preceding the issue of the booklet; a short description of the building; a biographical sketch of some local author, and a list of magazines available for reading at home.

No. 2 of *The Open Shelf* is really a marvellous production: its contents include 20 pages of closely printed matter similar to that issued in No. 1, but there are additional illustrations, excellent reproductions from photographs, of the interior of the library. This feature of a periodical guide is, to my mind, a most desirable one: nothing should be more likely to encourage and attract readers than pictures of beautiful rooms in which are to be found, nicely arranged, the best literature of all time. The ninth issue of *The Open Shelf* is particularly rich in illustrations and literary matter: its contents include a concise account of the work of Izaak Walton, with his portrait, a pretty river-side scene, choice facsimiles of copies of his *Angler*, facsimiles of the title and frontispiece of Walton's lives, and the usual instalment of catalogue entries.

It would be interesting to know how these charming little books are produced at so low a price. One can readily understand after a glance through the numbers published that the

Cleveland Library is popular, and that *The Open Shelf* is eagerly purchased.

Other American guides have come to my notice, but although they may serve a very useful purpose, they are not sufficiently important, in comparison with that just noticed, to warrant an extended description.

English librarians have been a long time in recognising the value of the periodical guide, and it is not a little remarkable that the first librarians to adopt the system are superintendents of comparatively small libraries.

In the year 1890 a system of advertising the library by means of circulars of information was acknowledged in the pages of *THE LIBRARY*, as "the true practical librarianship." If good resulted from the issue of circulars, how much more good may be accomplished by the regular appearance of what we may call an extended circular! The periodical guide is, no doubt, the development of the circular, but it is significant that the first English quarterly guide appeared shortly after the visit of English librarians to America. To Mr. Brown belongs the credit of introducing the system into Britain. Mr. Brown has a receptive mind: he deserves our thanks, and, indeed, our censure for the introduction of many new ideas into our library systems.

Among the very useful matters Mr. Brown has introduced must be prominently placed his Adjustable Catalogue Holder, a plan admirably adapted for use where printed catalogues are thought unnecessary and periodical guides are issued.

The *Clerkenwell Quarterly Guide for Readers* is the title of Mr. Brown's periodical guide. The first number appeared in July, 1894. The earlier numbers consisted of useful notes, classified lists of additions to the library, and rules, very necessary rules no doubt, respecting that abomination called "open access."

Many of the most interesting features of the early numbers have disappeared and the guide is now little more than a class list of additions to the library.

The Brentonian, which is the name given to my own quarterly guide, was first issued in March, 1895. It consists of 20 pages of printed matter, 7 pages of which are devoted to catalogue purposes, 4 pages to matter of an historical character, and the remainder to advertisements. The cost of publication is entirely covered by the receipts for advertisements, and 1,000 copies are distributed gratuitously every three months.

The object of *The Brentonian* is twofold, and to a certain

extent it is quite original in its scope. It is intended, chiefly, to be of service to borrowers as a guide to the new books which are added from time to time; but it is also designed for the purpose of directing the inhabitants of the town to the records of their ancestors. Brentford is a town with a history of considerable importance, and nothing is more calculated to attract the attention of the public than the record of its past life. Each number of *The Brentonian* contains, in addition to catalogue matter, a short article of permanent interest upon some historic event which has transpired in the town, and I can assure you that these articles have been the means of inducing many to use the books in the local collection of our reference department. A scheme for enlarging *The Brentonian* is being formulated, and I contemplate adding, in the near future, photographic copies of old local prints, a bibliography of local literature, and short articles upon the history of English literature. These are all features of real interest to persons using a library, and I am convinced that a periodical guide is a fitting place for the insertion of such matter.

Three months after the appearance of *The Brentonian*, Mr. Cotgreave issued the *West Ham Library Notes*. I am sorry to rob Mr. Cotgreave of the place he claims in this matter of the introduction of a periodical guide. Those who have seen the first issue of the *West Ham Notes* may remember the opening sentences of the introduction in which it is stated that "There is but one other public library¹ in this country which publishes such a journal." *The Brentonian* was issued in March, 1895, and the *West Ham Library Notes* in June, 1895. The error is a small one, but for the sake of accuracy it is important enough to require correction.

The *West Ham Library Notes* is undoubtedly one of the best publications of the kind which has yet been issued in this country. One often wonders how it is Mr. Cotgreave finds the time to be so very thorough in all he does.

The contents of the *West Ham Library Notes* are of a varied, but interesting and useful character. The list of additions to the library is classified, and occasionally interspersed with brief notes upon the character of the books; there are also articles dealing with the history of the West Ham libraries, miscellaneous jottings, lists of donors, articles of a literary character, and illustrations.

¹ Clerkenwell.

We are accustomed to expect good work from Mr. Doubleday, and in the *Hampstead Quarterly Guide for Readers* we find many useful features. The issue of this periodical in November, 1895, was an encouraging proof of the gradually extending interest in the periodical guide. No. 1, the only part I have had the pleasure of seeing, possesses many excellent features, and, if one may judge from the bill of fare contained in the introduction, it is evident that those who use the Hampstead libraries will be kept fully up to date in all matters affecting their welfare.

At Newington a monthly record has been established with the title *Newington Library Chronicle*. If I am rightly informed this periodical now appears every quarter.

The contents of this guide include, in addition to the list of books, a summary of lectures delivered in connection with the library, notes upon local history, and counter gossip.

London was considerably behind the provinces in adopting the Libraries Acts, but in the interesting development we are considering it has set the example and leads the way.

In the provinces Nottingham was the first to adopt the system of issuing a periodical. *The Nottingham Library Bulletin* was first issued in July, 1896. Mr. Potter Briscoe's long experience as an editor is admirably demonstrated in this bulletin; its pages are full of interesting matter from beginning to end, and there can be no doubt that it is highly appreciated by Nottingham borrowers.

The cover of each number is illustrated with a view of the imposing structure in which the library is located, and the literary matter is illustrated with portraits of local celebrities. Its other contents consist of notes on the Lending and Reference Departments, a key to the Indicator, and valuable articles on special collections in the library, which include English History, Natural Science, Greek and Roman Literature, &c. An especially practical feature recently added is that which tells borrowers how to treat books.

At Willesden a quarterly record is issued on lines similar to those already mentioned.

We have now considered at some length the various features connected with this most interesting development in library work. Librarians have their worries, and among them is that of keeping borrowers acquainted with the most recent additions to the shelves; the periodical guide is an admirable method of doing this, and, from actual experience, I can recommend it.

Before concluding, let me suggest some further developments in this particular work; there is, I am convinced, an interesting future for the literary inclined librarian who takes up this matter.

There is already some evidence to show that the issue of a quarterly or periodical guide will supersede the annual report; several of the guides I have described contain matter of the character usually inserted in annual reports. This, I am inclined to believe, will be a distinct advantage; the public will be better acquainted with the inner working of the library, and the amount expended for printing the report may be used for improving or extending the periodical.

In most libraries attention is given to the collection of books bearing upon the trades of the districts in which they are situated; in the pages of our quarterlies information concerning these books may be inserted, and a great service will be rendered to those who are interested in literature of this character.

Some few seasons back this Association listened with considerable interest to an excellent paper from Mr. Ballinger upon "Free Libraries and the Photographic Survey of Counties"; many admirable suggestions bearing upon the collection of photographs were made, and hints upon what it was necessary to have in such a collection were given; it seems to me that collections of this kind are of exceptional value to any community, and librarians have an excellent opportunity of considerably enhancing the importance of their local collections by giving attention to the suggestions contained in Mr. Ballinger's paper. Photography and local literature will provide most valuable and interesting material for the periodical guide, and in the near future I expect to see in some of our periodical bulletins reproductions of scarce prints, photographs of old historic buildings, which may suffer from the ravages of uninterested town authorities; pictures of buildings which are interesting from an architectural point of view, portraits of local celebrities, and, in short, anything that is likely to prove useful to those who visit our libraries. At this point I should like to refer to the quarterly bulletin issued by Mr. Ballinger, for it is in most respects the best publication I have yet had the privilege of seeing. The paper, printing and general get-up of the *Cardiff Public Library Journal* are excellent, and it is no exaggeration to say that the articles it contains would do credit to any of our most scholarly periodicals; in the first number,

for instance, which appeared in January, 1897, there is an article of considerable interest upon "The Study of History," written by a gentleman thoroughly qualified to guide readers in this particular branch of knowledge. In addition to this there are lists of books in the Library bearing upon subjects of the day ; topical subjects ; additions to the Library ; and a portrait of the Chairman of the Cardiff Libraries Committee. In the following number there are also some excellent articles on special subjects, aids to readers, &c., and a reproduction from a photograph of the building in which the library is located.

The Cardiff Library Journal will be of immense service to those who have the good fortune to use the Cardiff Library, and it will also be useful to librarians in other places who contemplate issuing similar bulletins. The periodical is published at one penny.

At Plymouth Mr. Wright has recently commenced to issue a Library Monthly, and I am convinced that he will find it greatly appreciated by those who use his Library.

In January, 1897, the *Battersea Public Libraries Quarterly Guide* was published, and the numbers which have since been printed give promise of a most useful future.

We are continually discussing the very fascinating subject of libraries and their relation to education ; it seems to me that our share in the education of the people is more likely to be accomplished with the assistance of guides such as I have attempted to describe, and there is a grand opportunity awaiting librarians who are anxious to popularise their libraries, and attract those who have hitherto neglected to avail themselves of the privilege of using these storehouses of the world's best literature.

FRED. TURNER.