

## Public Libraries in South Africa.

A CENTURY and a half ago there was published by 'A Gentleman of the Temple' what Mr. H. B. Wheatley, in his book on the formation of Libraries, describes as 'a useful little volume.' It was entitled *A Critical and Historical Account of all the Celebrated Libraries in Foreign Countries, as well Ancient as Modern*. In the course of this account the writer observes that 'as the condition and abilities of such as would form Libraries are to be distinguished, so regard must likewise be had to places, for it is very difficult to procure, or collect, books in some countries, without incredible expense; a design of that kind would be impracticable in America, Africa and some parts of Asia.'

"At the present day there is no part of the world in which the Public Library system has been so largely and intelligently developed, and so liberally supported, both from the public purse and by private munificence, as in certain portions of the United States of America; and even in the benighted continent of Africa, in those temperate regions of the South where Europeans have made their home, the design which once seemed so impracticable has been carried out with no small measure of success.

"Before proceeding to the immediate subject of this introduction I may perhaps be permitted to say a few words with regard to the characteristics of the Public Library system in the Cape Colony. I am the more tempted to do so since Mr. Greenwood, in his work on Public Libraries, which has now appeared in a third and decidedly improved edition, while giving some account of the working of these institutions in 'America and Canada,' and in Australasia, continues to wholly ignore South Africa. The Library statistics of the Cape Colony are annually published in a very convenient return, which is easily procurable; but Mr. Greenwood's impressions with regard to Africa are apparently identical with those entertained by 'A Gentleman of the Temple' a century and a half ago. I have

said that the new edition of Mr. Greenwood's book is distinctly an improvement on its predecessors; but it still remains regrettable that this work, useful as in some respects it is, should have covered ground which ought before now to have been occupied by the pen of some writer able to combine, with the qualifications of an enthusiast, those of an expert.

"Mr. Greenwood tells us that in 1879 the number of Public Libraries established (presumably in the United Kingdom), under the Act of 1850, was only 87; in 1886 there were 133; in the middle of last year, when his last edition was issued, a remarkable increase was shown, the Act having been adopted by 208 districts; and this extension of the movement has since then made further progress, especially in some of the metropolitan and suburban districts. The official figures are not quite so favourable as those of Mr. Greenwood. I have before me a return presented to Parliament, on the motion of Mr. Leng,<sup>1</sup> in November last, showing, with many useful particulars, the names of all places in Great Britain and Ireland in which the Public Libraries Acts had been adopted. From this return I find that the number of places in which, under either the general Acts or analogous local provisions, Libraries had been actually opened, at the most recent date for which statistics were obtainable, was—in England, 142; in Scotland, 13; in Wales, 8; and in Ireland, 6: total, 169.

"Turning from the English return to that presented to both Houses of Parliament during the last Session of the Cape Legislature, I find that the number of Public Libraries in the Cape Colony in 1889 was 64, exclusive of one which was closed in the course of that year 'on account of exodus of inhabitants to the Transvaal.' Considering that at the Cape there is no general Library Act, that municipal corporations are for the most part poor, and handicapped by the limited means at their disposal in carrying out the primary objects of their existence, that in the Colony there are, or until recently have been, very few men of great wealth, and that of what private opulence there is but little has hitherto been attracted towards the endowment or support of public institutions, the fact that at the Cape there should exist no less than 64 Public Libraries, as against 169 in the whole of the United Kingdom, suggests a comparison of which the Colony need have no reason to feel ashamed.

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<sup>1</sup> Now Sir John Leng. The statistics quoted above are obsolete, but they may still serve to mark an *époque*.

"The oldest Library in the colony is that at Cape Town, established in 1818, and, as it now seems, somewhat magniloquently described as 'The South African Public Library of the Colony of the Cape of Good Hope.' It is not only the oldest, but by far the largest library in the Colony, containing as it did at the date of the last return 47,906 volumes, which figure I believe includes the invaluable collection of books and manuscripts presented to the Library by Sir George Grey, a former Governor of the Colony, who has more recently enriched, by a similar munificence, the Public Library of Auckland in New Zealand. When the South African Library was created it was directed, by Government proclamation, that 'the funds for its support should be derived from a certain charge upon every cask of wine passing through the market of Cape Town,' the wine trade then being the principal source of wealth to the inhabitants, and the staple export of the Colony. This peculiar species of octroi lasted till 1828, since which year the revenue of the library has been mainly derived from local subscriptions supplemented by a Parliamentary grant—perhaps it should rather be said, from a Parliamentary grant, supplemented by local subscriptions. It may be worth noting, in view of the observations made in 1739 in his 'useful little volume' by the 'Gentleman of the Temple,' that the nucleus of the Cape Town Library consisted of a considerable number of volumes, called the 'Dessinian Collection, which were bequeathed by one Joachim Dessin, 'to serve as a foundation of a Public Library for the advantage of the community,' so far back as the year 1761.

"There is scarcely a town at the Cape which has not now its Public Library; they exist in many places which in England would be regarded as petty villages. This fact is the more remarkable, because in the country districts, and especially in the Western Province, the bulk of the population are of Dutch origin, speak and read only the *minimum* of English, if any, which they may find necessary for social or business purposes, and possess little taste for literature. Of course, in such places the libraries (as is also the case in many districts in England) are on a very small scale, and the collections of books often of no great value; but it would be a grave mistake to measure the beneficial influence exercised by such institutions, small and struggling as they may be, by the intrinsic value of the volumes on their shelves. The system which has been adopted in such places is that, under certain regulations pro-

mulgated in 1874, the Colonial Government makes an annual grant, not exceeding £100, on the principle of 'Pound for Pound' with the amount raised in the locality itself. This amount is raised in the form of subscriptions, entitling the contributors to certain privileges—otherwise no one would subscribe—but subject to the express condition, prescribed by the Government Regulations, that, whenever the Library is open, its contents shall be equally accessible to all members of the public, whether subscribers or not. I find that over half the Libraries now existing in the Colony have been established since these Regulations were issued in 1874. Besides the South African Library, a few others, on account of their exceptional importance, receive special Parliamentary grants, varying from £350 to £200. The principal among these are those at Grahamstown, Kimberley, King William's Town and Port Elizabeth, all of which contain collections of books exceeding 10,000 volumes. Other Libraries containing collections exceeding 5,000 volumes are those at the Mission Institution at Lovedale, at Queen's Town and at Graaff-Reinet."

The above passages are transcribed from the "Introduction" to a catalogue of the Kimberley Public Library, compiled by the present writer, and published some five years ago. Some one has observed that any individual who prides himself on accuracy, and seeks to chasten that pride, can find no better antidote, no more effective instrument of discipline, than the preparation of a catalogue of books. In this instance the compiler could not assert even such pretension to infallibility as, according to the late Master of Trinity, may be based on the title of extreme youth; had he done so, the discovery of the many defects and shortcomings of his work, to which, as chairman of the Library Committee, he had devoted a good deal of his leisure for some years, and which, in the treatment of subsequent accessions, and with the possibility in view, at some future date, of a demand for another edition, he has endeavoured to continue and improve, would have been sufficient to effectually eradicate any such fond illusion. The editor of *THE LIBRARY*, however, to whom a copy was sent for review—and reviewed it was with much benevolence—invited me either to use this "Introduction" as the basis for an article on the history and working of Public Libraries in South Africa, or to permit the adaptation of such portions of it as might seem serviceable for the purpose. With innate indolence, I availed

myself of the less onerous alternative ; but having been again asked for a direct contribution on the subject, I feel that, like Mrs. Dombey, I ought to "make an effort" to respond to the editor's maieutic art. The passages quoted may, perhaps, still serve as a sort of text, or preliminary sketch, which, with some qualifications and additions, may suffice to give the readers of THE LIBRARY as much information as they are likely to desire with regard to the present position and salient characteristics of Public Library work in the southern portion of the Dark Continent.

The remainder of the above-mentioned "Introduction" is chiefly occupied with a short history of the Kimberley Library—which was established fourteen years ago, and of which I have had the honour to be Chairman for the last thirteen years—and an explanation and discussion of the rules and methods of cataloguing adopted by the compiler. Perhaps I may be permitted to add that we are always happy to exchange catalogues with similar institutions ; if any of the principal Libraries in the United Kingdom, with whom such exchange has not yet been made, should care to effect one, application should be made to Messrs. H. Sotheran, at whose place of business in the Strand some copies of our catalogue have been deposited for that purpose.

As already stated, the observations quoted above now naturally require some qualification and correction. The worthy Mr. Greenwood, for instance, in the same year, 1891, published a fourth and enlarged edition of his work, containing some 600 pages, of which less than two are devoted to South Africa. "The Public Libraries," we read, "at (*sic*) Natal and Cape Town represent the best part of the work now being carried on in South Africa . . . Things move slowly in South Africa, except where it is a case of money-making, pure and simple. The Dutch and the coloured sections have to be taken into account, and there is no denying the fact that the Dutch phlegm has affected the Anglo-Saxon community." Such are the main points in Mr. Greenwood's contribution to the treatment of the subject, which can scarcely be described as either exhaustive or profound. Mr. Greenwood may, perhaps, be surprised to learn that Natal is not a town, but a colony of the first-class, with the privileges of responsible government, some millions of public debt, and everything handsome about it ; and that, on the other hand, there is only one town in Natal, the port of Durban, which can

boast of a Public Library of even the second rank. He may also permit me to assure him that, to the best of my belief, Library committees in no part of South Africa have found themselves seriously embarrassed by the necessity of "taking into account" the tastes and exigencies of "the coloured sections." It may, however, be added that the Library at Lovedale, which is to a large extent a native training college, under the able management of Dr. Stewart, is one of the most creditable and interesting institutions of the kind which can be found at the Cape.

The fact, however, as stated above, that "in the country districts, and especially in the Western Province, the bulk of the population are of Dutch origin, speak and read only the *minimum* of English, if any, which they may find necessary for social or business purposes, and possess little taste for literature," is not without its importance. In Mr. Greenwood's elegant phrase, "there is no denying the fact" that there is a good deal of "Dutch phlegm" in the composition of the Boer of the old school. In many cases he would probably be inclined to adapt the dilemma of the Caliph Omar, and to hold that books, so far as they agree with the Bible, are superfluous, and when they differ from it pernicious; in neither alternative would he see the advantage of devoting any of his scanty store of hard-earned cash to their acquisition. On patriotic grounds he may sometimes go so far in the way of supporting the local "Krant," written in the Cape *patois*, as to allow his name to be placed on the list of subscribers—which, the publisher is wont to complain, is not exactly the same thing as paying his subscription. Not long ago, I was trying a case on circuit, in which one Dutch paper sued an "esteemed contemporary" for libel; but the only damage proved was that a few farmers had stopped their subscriptions, all of which turned out to be hopelessly in arrear. "An old farmer," I read the other day in a local paper, "recently went to the office of the Cradock *Afrikaner* and discontinued his subscription, saying he was too old to concern himself with worldly affairs and had already ordered his coffin." In these circumstances, it is really remarkable that the Library movement should have flourished and ramified to the actual extent in the country towns at the Cape. During the last few years the progress has been surprising. When I wrote my "Introduction" the number of Public Libraries in the Cape Colony was 64; during the last six years I find, from the latest Parliamentary return, that the total has increased to 96, or by just

50 per cent. Meanwhile, the number of volumes in the five principal libraries mentioned above has increased from 100,903 to 131,543; the actual figures being now as follows:—Cape Town, 56,916; Port Elizabeth, 27,073; Kimberley, 18,886; King William's Town, 14,851; Grahamstown, 13,817. Considerable and gratifying as during the same period has been the extension of the system in England, I doubt whether a greater ratio of progress could be shown. It should, moreover, be remembered that unfortunately we have no Mr. Passmore Edwards—not even a Mr. Carnegie—at the Cape. We can, indeed, point with pride to the existence of a few local millionaires; but at present they seem to be all engrossed, *à qui mieux mieux*, in the erection of palaces in Park Lane.

Such measure of success as has been attained must be partly ascribed to the influence of what Matthew Arnold would have called the "remnant"—representatives of whom are to be found in almost every colonial district, just as Arnold found them in the States—partly to the fostering influence of State aid, principally, perhaps, to the general spread of education. Education at the Cape is not yet compulsory; "the coloured sections have to be taken into account;" but the Department, under the control of a prudent and energetic Scotchman, casts its net very wide, with on the whole conspicuous success. The vehicles of study are mainly English text-books; and the younger generation, whether Dutch or English in origin, on leaving school or college, have acquired a taste for English literature. "*La langue anglaise*," says M. Blouet in a recent work, "*fait tant de progrès que, dans la bibliothèque populaire de Burghersdorp, l'une des villes les plus hollandaises du Cap, j'ai trouvé deux mille volumes anglais et environ quarante livres hollandais.*" (*La Maison John Bull et Cie*, par Max O'Rell, p. 298.) In another country town, where the leading spirit is a prominent member of the Afrikaner Bond, an interesting experiment has been tried. I usually endeavour, when travelling on circuit, to inspect the local Library—which is often a pleasure—as well as the local gaol, which is always a duty. At the place in question, I was escorted by the gentleman to whom I have referred, who happened to be the District Sheriff, to visit two Public Libraries one English, and one Dutch, each housed in a wing of the Town Hall. In both there was a fair collection of books; but I observe, from the latest Parliamentary return, that in this, a thoroughly Dutch district, the average monthly circulation of

books was, in the English Library, 230, in the Dutch, 7. The annual subscriptions to the former amounted to £39, to the latter, £8. The average daily attendance was, at the former, 20; at the latter, *nil*. It is not difficult to predict the upshot; *ceci tuera cela*.\*

It would naturally be expected that, as in other matters, so with regard to the Library movement, the Dutch language and literature would receive special recognition and patronage in the two Dutch Republics. It must, however, be borne in mind that, while but few books have been published in the colonial *patois*, the High Dutch of the Netherlands is almost as unfamiliar as English to the ordinary country Boer, who would probably find Hildebrand nearly as perplexing as Thackeray. I have little information as to Libraries in the Orange Free State; but I believe that at the capital, Bloemfontein, there is a respectable institution of the kind. At Pretoria, the capital of the South African Republic, there is a "State Library." The *Catalogus van de Staatsbibliotheek der Zuid-Afrikaansche Republiek*, published in 1894, contains a fair assortment of general literature, largely in Dutch, and including a considerable number of books presented by the Society of Dutch Literature at Leyden. The State Library also comprises the contents of a former Public Library, which has contributed to its shelves some 2,300 English works, formerly acquired by the subscriptions of residents at Pretoria. At Johannesburg, the great mining centre, little has been done in the past—Johannesburg, in fact, unlike the feminine creations of the modern playwright, scarcely has a past—but a good deal may be expected in the not distant future. *Non res sed spes*. As I observed in a later passage of my Introduction, "it is a common experience that literary and intellectual interests are plants of slow growth in mining centres. The raw material and heterogeneous elements of which a 'rush' of diggers is composed, in one of the Western States of America, have little in common with the academic spirit of Massachusetts. The men who gathered together at 'the dry diggings' from all quarters of the world, when diamonds were discovered on the farm of Bultfontein, and at the 'new rush' or 'Colesberg Kopje,' afterwards to become famous as the town of Kimberley, were of a type very different

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\* Since writing the above, I have again visited the district in question. I learn that, while the English Library continues to flourish, the Dutch Library has for some time been closed; *ceci a tué cela*.

from the leisured students of Mr. Dessin's books or Sir George Grey's collection in the metropolis of the Colony." The experience of the early days of Johannesburg has not been dissimilar to that of Kimberley. As the sagacious Greenwood puts it, "things move slowly in South Africa, except where it is a case of money-making pure and simple." But Mr. Greenwood should really endeavour to possess his soul in patience. Is he sure that they move so much more rapidly elsewhere? Johannesburg is a sort of infant prodigy, a mere child of ten; and within the last year or two a large fund—I believe about £10,000—has been raised by local contributions—at Kimberley we were content with £6,000—an excellent site has been secured, and preliminary arrangements made for the establishment of a Public Library, which, if liberally maintained and judiciously managed, may in time become an institution in every respect worthy of the wealth and enterprise of the South African Chicago.

It would, moreover, be a mistake to infer that English and Dutch are the only languages for which provision has to be made in the Libraries of South Africa. At Port Elizabeth, in particular, the principal port and commercial centre, many of the most respected and influential citizens are of German origin. The section of German literature, in which the librarian is an expert, has always been well maintained, and about 1,400 works in that language were last year in circulation. At Kimberley, where the people like to describe themselves as "a cosmopolitan community," there has always been a considerable foreign element among those connected with diamond dealing and the mining industry. The Library contains about 2,000 volumes in French, German and Italian; and to these there has recently been added a good selection of the best modern Dutch works. "Max O'Rell," in his description of his tour through the British Colonies, I think mentions only two Public Libraries, both in South Africa. His reference to that at Burgersdorp has been already quoted; of Kimberley he says, "*avant d'aller aux mines, et pour vous montrer que Kimberley n'est pas un camp d'aventurier, mais une ville habitée par des gens intelligents, qui lisent et s'instruisent, je dois faire mention de la Bibliothèque publique, une des plus considérables et des mieux fournies que j'ai vues aux Colonies et qui possède environ quinze cents volumes français, représentant ce que notre littérature a de meilleur, depuis les poésies de Malherbe jusqu'aux romans de M. Alphonse Daudet.*"

There is a hackneyed story of a certain work on the geographical distribution of snakes and of the brevity—justifiable in the circumstances—of the chapter relative to Iceland. At this stage of the present article, to interpolate an assertion that “there are no Public Libraries in South Africa” would appear paradoxical but in one sense would not be inexact. In England, the Public Library, though in many cases owing its inception to the stimulus of private generosity, as a rule, I understand, is supported entirely by a special rate; presumably, in the future—since Lord Herschell’s ingenuity convinced a majority of the House of Lords that a Public Library, belonging to the Corporation of Manchester, is “the property of a literary institution,” and, as such, exempt from income tax—to this will be added an indirect and modest subsidy from the public revenue. At the Cape, on a suggestion from the present writer, an Act was passed some years ago exempting Libraries from the liability to local rates; but from such rates, as a rule, they derive no direct support, with the exception of a moderate grant in aid, contributed out of municipal revenue, by the corporations of Cape Town, Port Elizabeth and Kimberley. Libraries in South Africa are thus to a great extent subscription Libraries, assisted, on conditions already explained, by a Parliamentary grant. At Kimberley the Committee have long been of opinion that such a system is not the best, is only, in fact, a sort of temporary compromise, and have at length succeeded in placing the institution under their control in a sufficiently strong financial position to justify the offer, in consideration of a slight increase in the municipal grant, of an extension of the privilege of borrowing books, without subscription or fee, on the same system as at home, to every ratepayer. The offer has not yet been accepted; but then we must remember that “things move slowly in South Africa, except where it is a case of money-making”; and I am not without hope that some such *Ausgleich* will be effected ere long. At Port Elizabeth, also, I believe it is in contemplation to apply a recent handsome bequest of a wealthy merchant to some similar purpose; and at Durban—“at Natal”—a scheme for the municipalisation of the Library is also on foot.\* It can scarcely be doubted that such an example, once set, would prove suffi-

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\* A “Note,” mentioning the realisation of this project, will be found in THE LIBRARY for November.

ciently successful to provoke imitation, and thus would greatly enlarge the scope of work and sphere of usefulness of Public Libraries in this part of the world.

And is the work really a useful one? Is the object in view, and are the results attainable, worth the effort and the toil? To such a question, in the opinion of most of the readers of THE LIBRARY, there can probably be but one answer. And yet, to the labourer in this as in other fields, there may come periods of discouragement and occasions for doubt. The Library movement, like most schemes of social amelioration, began tentatively in an atmosphere of apathy and scepticism; it has engendered much enthusiasm in its progress; perhaps in some quarters there is now a suspicion that the enthusiasm may have been somewhat overdone; and there are not wanting symptoms that a period of reaction may before long set in. Practical politics, it has been said, consist mainly in deciding which of three unsatisfactory courses is the least unsatisfactory to adopt. There is no *Vollkommenheit*, no attainment of the ideal, in human things; amid all our aspirations, *surgit amari aliquid*; we have to be content with the broken arcs and cannot grasp the perfect round. A story is told of Mr. Cecil Rhodes—who sometimes exhibits a dislike of classical quotations scarcely to be expected from a son of Oriel—that he was once asked, after a stay at Sandringham, to write something of the kind in a visitors' book. He followed the example of another eminent statesman and selected an aphorism which had already received the meed of popular approbation—*calum non animum*, &c. The readers in Public Libraries at the Cape are of much the same type and calibre as those at home, and have much the same tastes. "Have you got *Mr. Barnes of New York*?" asked a visitor to our Library of the assistant behind the counter; and, on being informed that that *magnum opus* had not yet been received, intimated a somewhat disparaging opinion of the institution, but kindly consented, as a *pis aller*, to put up with "Ouida's last." Perhaps the average proportion of fiction in circulation is somewhat larger in South African than in English libraries. The circumstances of the country are such that the class of intelligent operators and mechanics—among whom, as was observed by Sir John Lubbock, a large proportion of the students of solid literature may, for the reasons he indicated, be expected to be found—is comparatively small. We scarcely see as much as Lord Rosebery would like of "the thumb-mark

of the artisan." We have never had the doubtful advantage of a "Labour Party" in the Cape Parliament; the competition of "the coloured sections"—*comme il avait raison, ce cher Greenwood!*—"has to be taken into account." At Kimberley, however, a branch Library for the workmen in the employ of the De Beers Mining Company has been established, and much appreciated; but even there, I fancy, there is a steady inquiry for "Ouida's last," or the latest product of the sprightly fancy of Miss Marie Corelli. The climatic conditions, too, and the lassitude produced by the summer heat, may perhaps enhance the demand—wholesome enough within reasonable limits—for literature of the lightest kind. But no one can take an active interest in Library administration, for a prolonged period, without recognising that the shield has another side, and being gratified by the variety of the forms of inquiry and research which are promoted and stimulated by the accessibility of a large collection of carefully-chosen books. There can be no doubt that the existence of a good reference library, here as elsewhere, is abundantly justified by the extent to which its contents are consulted by systematic students. Endeavours, too, are made, with considerable success, to specialise in appropriate directions. The Cape Town Library contains a unique collection of works, especially old books, relating to the discovery, occupation, geography and history of South Africa, and at Kimberley much has been done—though with increasing difficulty, owing to our more limited resources, and the greatly enhanced market value of such works—on similar lines. The collection of foreign literature has already been mentioned, and the library is also exceptionally strong, for a colonial institution, in works on bibliography. A local speciality to which, in the centre of the diamond mining industry, much attention has naturally been paid, consists in works on such subjects as mining and mineralogy, geology and chemistry, and the history, nature and occurrence of gems and precious stones. Such works are likely to prove of much value to the students of the South African School of Mines, recently established in connection with the Cape University, and embracing in its programme a course of training, theoretical and practical, both at Cape Town and on the Diamond Fields, from which great things are hoped, as affording a new opening for the abilities of our colonial youth.

There are other topics on which I should have liked to add a word or two did space permit. I have omitted all reference to

local questions and problems—such as the organisation of establishments, the best methods of acquiring books for colonial institutions, experiences as to binding, systems of cataloguing, classification and issue—which would scarcely prove of any general interest. I cannot help observing, however, that our experiences in South Africa might afford some useful hints to those who hope to see a gradual extension of the Library system among the smaller towns and villages at home. Nothing could be more interesting or instructive, from this point of view, than the account, which has appeared in *THE LIBRARY*, of Lady Verney's excellent work at Middle Claydon, a typical rural parish in which, when the present writer knew it, under the paternal régime of that staunch Protestant and good old Whig, the late Sir Harry Verney, and his brother-in-law, the late Dean of Ripon, a much-respected "Evangelical" of the old school, a few "improving" tracts, with an occasional "popular" lecture or missionary meeting, would have been considered ample mental *pabulum* for the parishioners. The example which has been set at Claydon should surely be imitated elsewhere, perhaps with some help from the county or district council, and with the co-operation of the country parson, and the master or mistress of the village school. To make rural life attractive, we know that, in the opinion of Lord Salisbury, there is nothing like a circus—*panem et circenses*—to which, I fancy, he has recently added a genial suggestion about bazaars. But the circus, or the bazaar, after all, can never be other than an occasional dissipation; parish councils were described by a bucolic member, in a village of the writer's acquaintance, as "a winter pastime;" and there seems no reason why the room in the school-house, or elsewhere, where the rustic council takes its winter pastime, should not, at other times, be made the nucleus of a rustic Library.

It well may be that, in these discursive observations, I have given too large a proportion of my space to the particular Library with which I happen to be most familiar. I hope, however, I have succeeded in giving a general and substantially accurate notion of the theme of which I was asked to treat. Perhaps one of the chief obstacles with which librarians and others connected with the administration of Libraries in this part of the world have to contend, is their comparative isolation. Distances are great, and we have but few opportunities of comparing notes and profiting by the experience of others. Some time ago I brought before my colleagues, on the Kimberley Committee, a project for

forming a South African Library Association. A communication on the subject was sent to Cape Town, in the hope that the matter might be taken up by the senior institution. The reply was favourable in principle, and it was decided, as a preliminary, to obtain the rules of the English and American Societies; but, so far as I am aware, no further practical steps have yet been taken. Perhaps we need a little stimulus from beyond our borders. The British Association, I understand, is to hold its next annual meeting at Toronto. Will not the Library Association some day follow this example, and, by holding one of its future meetings at the Cape, forge a new link in the chain of common interests, pursuits and sympathies, which, as with a silken cord, binds the Colonies and the Empire?

P. M. LAURENCE.

