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LIBRARIANS IN CONFERENCE.

ANNUAL MEETING AT BOURNEMOUTH.

The annual meeting of the Library Association opened at Bournemouth yesterday, when meetings of the Council, the Finance Committee, and certain branches of the Association were held.

To-day the association will be officially welcomed by the Mayor of Bournemouth, and the day's programme includes the address of the president (Lord Malmesbury), and papers on "E. W. B. Nicholson: In Memoriam," by Mr. Henry R. Tedder, of the Athenæum, London; and "The Public Library and the Tutorial Class," by Mr. J. Dover Wilson, his Majesty's Inspector of Tutorial Classes. In the afternoon there will be papers on "Planning a Catalogue of Local Literature," "The Extension of Public Libraries to Rural Districts," and "Music in Public Libraries," with discussions, which are to be opened by Mr. C. W. F. Goss (Bishopsgate Institute), Mr. E. Wyndham Hulme (Patent Office), and Mr. Herbert Jones (Kensington).

LONDON CIRCULATING LIBRARIES.

EARLY METHODS OF BOOKLENDING.

The history of Circulating Libraries, as the term is now understood, has yet to be written. The system in vogue to-day dates from about 1840, when Mr. Mudie opened a little shop in Bloomsbury, but the origin of the movement goes far back into the mist of ages. Chevallier, in his "Origines de l'Imprimerie de Paris," 1664, states that in 1342, a century before the introduction of printing, a law was framed to compel the Paris stationers to keep books to be lent on hire for the special benefit of poor students and others. Merryweather, in his "Bibliomania in the Middle Ages," gives a list of books so lent, with the prices for reading them—the charge for the loan of a Bible, for instance, being 10 sous.

There can be no doubt that the monasteries had a method of interchange in the matter of books; and long after the introduction of printing into London there was probably some system by which books were lent out to those who desired to read but could not afford to buy them. Mr. Joseph Gilbert, chief librarian of Cawthorn and Hutt's, in a paper read at the Library Association in February, 1887, quoted two early references to the system of booklending: one is from an advertisement at the end of the play, *The Thracian Wonder*, 1661, in which it is announced that "books may be read for a reasonable consideration"; and another is a passage from Nevile's "Poor Scholar," 1662, from which it is abundantly clear that the system of lending books for payment was by no means unknown.

We know from Benjamin Franklin's "Autobiography" that circulating libraries "were not in use" in London in 1725. Franklin lodged in Little Britain, next door to Wilcox, the bookseller (who lent Johnson and Garrick £5 when they found themselves stranded in London), and Wilcox agreed to lend Franklin books on "certain reasonable terms." The same kind of concession was probably made by other booksellers to other students; but the bookseller was not in business to lend books, but to sell them.

THE PIONEERS.

There seems to be no doubt that the pioneer of the movement was Samuel Fancourt (1678-1768), a poor Nonconformist minister, who failed in everything he undertook. He started a circulating library in Crane-court, Fleet-street, about 1730, the entrance fee being one guinea and the subscription 1s. per quarter. Between 1746-8 he published an "Alphabetical Catalogue" of the books and pamphlets, to which a classified index was added. He had got together a selection of 3,000 volumes; but, as time went on, opposition arose, Fancourt was unable to renew his supplies, and, with increasing age and infirmities, the old man had to give up the struggle, to sell his library, and to retire to Hoxton, where he died on June 8, 1768, in his 90th year. The tragedy of his life is told in the *Gentleman's Magazine* of 1784, and again by Mr. Archibald Clarke in the *Library* of June, 1900. As in the cases of other pioneers, others reaped where Fancourt had sown.

The early jealousies and opposition of the booksellers were soon worn down, for they realized the existence of a very large constituency of persons who if they could not borrow books would certainly not buy

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them. We know from Lackington's "Autobiography" that "when the circulating libraries were first opened the booksellers were most alarmed; but experience has proved that the sale of books, so far from being diminished thereby, has been most greatly increased." It was quite certain that, in spite of early failures, the circulating library had come to stay, and some of the booksellers acted the wise part of utilizing the new medium. One of the first booksellers to add book-lending to his business was T. Wright, at the Sign of The Bible, in Exeter Exchange, Strand, who, at least as early as 1743, had opened "a Library for Lending all Manner of Books at 16/- a Year." This is probably the same Wright who, possibly a little later, started a circulating library proper at 132, Strand, and this library, after being successively owned by Samuel Bathoe (who died in 1768), Bell and Cawthorn (who was at 132, Strand in 1804, according to Boyle's "City Guide"), is still in existence as Cawthorn and Hutt, at Cockspur-street, Charing-cross—undoubtedly one of the oldest business firms in London. Mr. Gilbert stated, in 1889, that "some of the books which were in use in this library at its first establishment are still issued to subscribers."

RIVALS AND IMITATORS.

There were doubtless many rivals to Fancourt and Wright, but the mortality must have been great, for by 1774 there were only four circulating libraries for London and its neighbourhood. It may be doubted if many of these institutions could be dignified with the term circulating libraries; most of them must have been booksellers who combined the trade in old and new books with lending volumes at so much each. In 1794, for instance, there was a circulating library at No. 2, Shoe-lane, where "New and Old Books [were] lent at 4s. per quarter," and "where may be had" "Monstrous Good Songs, Sentiments, and Toasts," with an elegant frontispiece, for 6d., and where, among other elevating literature, the "City Jester, a Budget of Wit," might have been had for 1s. The circulating library was not spared by the wits of the day, and the passage in Sheridan's *Rivals*, 1778, may be taken as symptomatic; he makes Sir Anthony Absolute declare:—

Madam, a circulating library in a town is an evergreen tree of diabolical knowledge! It blossoms through the year, and, depend upon it, Mrs. Malprop, that they who are so fond of handling the leaves will long for the fruit at last.

We should have been better able to estimate the nature of this "diabolical knowledge" if the owners of the circulating libraries had been in the habit of publishing catalogues of their books. A few copies of Fancourt's have survived, and one of a successful imitator, John Noble, has just recently come to light. John Noble and his brother Francis were, so far as can now be determined, for many years the most prominent of London circulating library-keepers. Francis Noble had a shop in Holborn, but, as we are told by John Nichols in his "Literary Anecdotes," "in consequence

of his daughter's obtaining a share of the first £30,000 prize"—presumably in a lottery—"that was ever sold, he retired from business," and died at an advanced age at Kentish Town on June 7, 1792.

NOBLE'S LIBRARY RULES.

John Noble catered for the West-end of London, and his establishment was at the sign of Dryden's Head, St. Martin's-court, near Leicester-square—a court which, in spite of its many changes, is still a book thoroughfare. Noble's Catalogue is an interesting and business-like production, and was issued during the year 1765, with an "Appendix for the Year 1766." It extends to 123 pages octavo, and enumerates over 5,500 books. The "Conditions to be Observed, and Consented to, by every Subscriber to John Noble's Circulating Library" are fully set out at the back of the title-page. They are 13 in number and may be briefly summarized:—(1) Yearly subscribers to pay 14s.—this is erased and 12s. written in; (2) quarterly subscribers to pay 4s.; (3) the money to be paid in advance; (4) subscribers to pay 6d. for their catalogue; (5) to give their names and places of abode, and, if required, to pay the value of the books they take away; (6) they were allowed to use two books at a time; (7) not to change books more than once a day without paying 3d. each time; (8) to send a list of 10 books when only two are wanted "to prevent disappointment"; (9) to have only one new book at a time and not to keep it more than three days; (10) to pay certain fines for keeping books longer than the specified time; (11) to make good any damage or loss; (12) to forfeit their subscription if they lend the books to a non-subscriber; and (13) "Subscribers living in any Part of London, may have their Books sent to their Houses, once a Week, upon paying One Shilling per Quarter Extraordinary." In addition to these conditions it was intimated that "Attendance is given at the Library from Eight o'Clock in the Morning, till Eight at Night, but no longer."

NOBLE'S CATALOGUE.

The conditions, it will be admitted, were extremely reasonable, and the cost of subscription much below that of anything in existence to-day for the same advantages. Every item in the Catalogue is priced, so that, in case of damage or loss the borrower was fully aware of the extent of his liabilities. If the tastes of Noble's customers may be judged from his Catalogue, the demand for books on history and antiquities would seem to be the most general, but "Novels and Romances" in folio, quarto, and octavo naturally figure largely. We have "Boccaccio's 100 novels and tales" and "Cervantes's exemplary novels" with "Sidney's Arcadia" and "Barclay's loves of Poliarchus and Argenis," all in folio, whilst the two highest priced books in this section are "Astrea" (£1 10s.) and "Pharamond" (£1 7s.). Nearly all the plays of the Shakespearean, Restoration, and early 18th century periods are here, and all at estimated values of 3s. or 4s. each. Shakespeare was not in



fashion and he makes a poor show; but one would like to get the first and second parts of *King Henry IV.* and *Henry VIII.* at the catalogue price of 6d. each. "Mr. Fielding's" novels are not only to be found, but also some of the "novels" to which they gave birth, such as "Anti Pamela, or Feigned Innocence Detected," "Apology for the Life of Mrs. Shamela Andrews," "Pamela's Conduct in High Life," and so forth. Probably a good many of the suggestive titles of these old novels and romances were the worst part about them, except, perhaps, their generally intolerable dullness. But Mr. Noble was clearly a man with a broad mind and had no desire to restrict the reading of his customers. The Divinity books include a generous sprinkling of sermons and what may be described as theological wranglings between eminent divines. Gardening, fariery, cookery, angling, and medicine are all catered for, as, indeed, is every stage of human knowledge, so far as it had been revealed up to 1765. A notable feature is the section of "nouvelles Françaises," of which there are 500 different titles, besides 500 other books in French. Even a few Italian books are in the Catalogue.

OTHER LONDON LIBRARIES.

Thomas Hookham, who was afterwards joined by Ebers, added a Circulating Library to his bookselling business at 15, Old Bond-street at the latter part of the 18th century, and this institute flourished for many years. Another famous circulating library, that of Day (formerly Rice) was started about 1776, and is still in a very flourishing condition at 96, Mount-street. In or about 1791 a very influential committee started a public library in Greek-street (subsequently removed to 36, St. Martin's-street, Leicester-square), which was of a far higher class than any previously in existence, and more nearly akin to the present London Library; to this there was an entrance fee of two guineas, and an annual subscription of one guinea; the subscribers were provided with a fine reading-room and other advantages. This library was in existence for some years, but in due course came to an end. Lack of good management and failure to recognize other times and other wants probably proved to be the "dryrot" of many of these excellent institutions.

William Lane, of the Minerva Press, Leaden-hall-street, established a circulating library there in or before 1774; 20 years later we find him publicly returning thanks for his "generous and respectable list of patronizers" and claiming that his library was "the first in London." It is said of him that he "established circulating libraries in every town and almost every village of the Empire," but this is probably an exaggeration. He is better known to-day as the printer and publisher of hosts of novels in duodecimo, in two, three, four, and even five volumes, mostly priced at 7s. per volume, and now often met with on the sixpenny stalls. Lane retired from the business about 1804, and died at the age of 76 in March, 1814, and his successor, A. K. Newman, appears to have abandoned the circulating library in favour of publishing and printing.

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