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An important figure in the establishment of free libraries in the United Kingdom, Edward Edwards (1812–1886) wrote this study, first published in 1869, as a handbook intended for promoters and managers of free town libraries. The book outlines the formation and workings of public libraries, beginning with British examples and proceeding to compare the British experience with libraries abroad, especially in America. Edwards presents strong evidence of the increasing number, and improving management, of libraries at this time, and also stresses the strikingly diverse circumstances under which libraries in the United Kingdom and abroad were established. The volume is an important historical document in library studies, and a testimony to Edwards' commitment and contribution to the free library movement which have been an inspiration to later generations of professional librarians.

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IN

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TOGETHER WITH

BRIEF NOTICES OF BOOK-COLLECTORS,
AND OF THE RESPECTIVE PLACES OF DEPOSIT OF THEIR
SURVIVING COLLECTIONS.

BY EDWARD EDWARDS.

LONDON
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P R E F A C E.

THE primary purpose of this Volume is to serve as a Handbook for Promoters and Managers of Free Town Libraries; especially of such Libraries as may hereafter be established under the 'Libraries Acts.' Its secondary purpose is to compare British experience in that matter with Foreign, and particularly with American, experience.

Eighteen years have now passed since the enactment of the first Libraries Act of the United Kingdom. Under that Act, and its followers, more than thirty Free Town Libraries have already been successfully established. They have been formed under circumstances of much diversity. Probably, the experience of each of them has something or other which may be usefully applied to the working of like institutions in other places.

In many European countries Free Libraries, under municipal control, are much older institutions than Town Libraries, of any kind, are in Britain. Sometimes, the Continental Town Libraries of early foundation have fallen into a state of comparative neglect and inefficiency,—arising from inadequate means of maintenance, and from minor causes. But there is still much, both in their history and in their methods of working, which may be found highly

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instructive. This volume will be seen to contain conclusive evidence, on the other hand, that knowledge of what has been done, of late years, in the matter of increasing the number and improving the management of Popular Libraries, both in Britain and in America, has been already turned to good account in several countries of Continental Europe.

It may also deserve remark, that the circumstance which more immediately attracted Continental attention to recent British and American legislation about Popular Libraries was the request made through the British Foreign Office, in 1849, for information (to be laid before Parliament,) concerning the history and management of Public Libraries generally, in various foreign States. There is evidence that the information so obtained—between the years 1849 and 1852—was eventually productive of good to the givers, as well as to the receivers.

Those Returns of 1849-52 contain, as respects several countries of Europe, the latest *official* and general accounts of Foreign Libraries which have been anywhere published, in any language. No book of reference, as yet published,—in any language,—gives from year to year systematic information on that subject. Inquirers have to seek it by a multitude of indirect channels, and the search is attended by much needless difficulty.

In relation to matters of trade, the Foreign Office, it is well known, has conferred an inestimable benefit on the Public at large by instituting, and publishing, the periodical reports of our Secretaries of Legation. Perhaps, it may not be thought an unreasonable presumption to hope that, some day or other, a public boon which has widely diffused knowledge about the growth, from year to year, of Foreign Trade and trading establishments, may be so enlarged as

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also to communicate knowledge about the progress of Foreign Libraries, Museums, and other establishments of an educational sort.

Meanwhile, writers who are necessarily devoid of official facilities,—however willing they may be to incur unremitting toil for the furtherance of their inquiries,—can, in some cases, give only approximations to full and exact knowledge, in lieu of such knowledge itself. Claiming credit for an earnest endeavour to attain to precise accuracy, they must also ask indulgence for occasional and inevitable shortcomings.

In what concerns the extension of the benefits of Free Public Libraries, supported by rates, to rural districts as well as to large towns, both the United States of America and the British American Provinces are, it is believed, much in advance of any European country whatever. Under the influence of that belief,—but also in the earnest hope that ere long its grounds may be taken away,—some notices of the character and results of recent American and Canadian legislation about Township and District Libraries have been included in this volume, and they have been drawn up with considerable fulness of detail.

For a preliminary remark or two upon the ‘Brief Notices of Collectors,’ the Reader is referred to the closing paragraphs of Book III.

SYCAMORES, WIMBLEDON COMMON,

28th March, 1869.

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CORRECTIONS.

PAGE 15, *Omit* the note in margin.

„ 119, } *For* ‘First Liverpool Consulting Library,’ *read* ‘Liverpool
and 120, } Free Libraries.’

PAGE 151, line 8 from bottom, *for* ‘ever’ *read* ‘even.’

[For Corrections to the ‘NOTICES OF COLLECTORS,’ see page 363.]

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