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Trieste

CATALOGUE

OF THE

Cape Colony

KIMBERLEY–PUBLIC LIBRARY.

COMPILED BY

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INTRODUCTION.

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 and 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 Free 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 shewn, 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, in November last, shewing, 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.

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 munifi-

cence, 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 1789 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 promulgated 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,