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GLEANINGS AT THE
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Hours in a Public Library: Gleanings at the Norwich Free Library by Henry F. Euren

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HENRY F. EUREN

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GLEANINGS AT THE NORWICH FREE LIBRARY

(For the "Norwich Mercury" and "Peoples' Weekly Journal,")

BY

Henry F. Euren.

NORWICH:
JARROLD AND SONS.

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HOURS

IN A

PUBLIC LIBRARY.



PUBLIC Libraries established under the provisions of the Free Public Libraries Act, 1850—(which has been extended by the Free Public Libraries and Museums Act, 1885)—are as yet comparatively few in number. It is, however, just possible that one of the results of Local Government reform will be a large increase of such institutions. There will be a wider realisation of the fact that the community has made no sufficient provision for the carrying on of the elementary education painfully acquired in youthful days, at the cost of parents, ratepayers, and taxpayers. Too often much of the money spent in this way is almost wasted. Energies are roused, but are allowed to become dormant, and eventually they die for want of continuous exercise. In populous towns, libraries for the people, started, supported, and worked at the cost of the people, show experimentally how the community may provide means for gathering a fuller harvest from the cultivation begun in the day school. These rate-supported Public Libraries are among the influences acting in the right direction. But as yet they have not been as well used as they might be. A general introduction into counties of such an institution, which really is co-operation for a good purpose, may, however, help us on to the fulfillment of the

idea that should animate the People's Library movement. This idea is not satisfied by the providing of pleasant or instructive books for reading by the fireside. It requires that there be made available, for the ill-educated, or the toil-worn, the store of knowledge accumulated in costly books, written too often in an unattractive form of words. The Conference of Librarians has been discussing how this can be done. Perhaps the most popular way of doing it would be by lecture-readings, if the compound term may be permitted. A few educated men and women might resolve to give of their time and talents in gleaning, from the volumes contained in the Public Library, materials for the instruction and enjoyment of their less-fortunate fellow-citizens, meeting them one evening in each week. In a small town or large village this would assuredly be popular, and there would always be ladies and gentlemen prepared to act. But residence in a large town is much less conducive to such a manifestation of public spirit. There are in fact, many persons there well qualified for the work, but the old saying, "One can't see the wood for the trees," exactly illustrates the situation. The press, however, is recognized as a popular guide and teacher, and in its columns one may assume the pleasant task of being a companion to the reader for an hour in a Public Library, without seeming to force one's-self into a singular notoriety. This is what the writer of this series of papers hopes to be. And just as a lover of books may go into a Library and spend his leisure hour in dipping into the pages, first of a volume on one subject, and then of a volume on another subject, so it will be with these papers. There will be no attempt at systematic exhaustion of one topic, and then the turning to something new. On the contrary, the reader will have no want of variety. And if only he can be stimulated to use the People's Library for his own improvement and enjoyment, by a close personal acquaintance with the riches stored on its shelves, the papers will not have been written in vain.

Glimpses into Old Records.



These glimpses we will get just now from the pages of three Blue-Books. Pray, kind reader, be not alarmed. Though the covers are of the bluest, the contents do not relate to present day politics. Our special volumes are the three issued by the Historical Manuscripts Commission in the years 1870, 71, and 72—the beginning of a valuable series not yet ended, and of which much more may be said later on.

Just a word at the outset about this Royal Commission. It was issued on April 2nd, 1869, to discover and make known to the public what was to be found of public interest in the collections of manuscripts and papers belonging to institutions and private persons. "The elucidation of History, and the illustration of Constitutional Law, Science, and Literature," were the objects to be kept in view by the Royal Commissioners and their assistants. The proposition immediately commended itself to those who held the possibilities of its fulfilment. This is made manifest in the three Blue Books above-mentioned. They form, as it were, a good compendium, which in after years the Commission could set forth in detail.

OF THE FIRST IMPORTANCE.

The House of Lords' historical documents, which are reported to number 29,507 down to the 1800, are now being described in detail. In these earlier reports one comes across some curious items. For example:—"The Lords were never satisfied with the *copy* of a document offered in evidence, or brought under their notice; nothing but the original was allowed to be received. Even the House of Commons submitted to their lordships' rule, and invariably sent the originals, while they retained only a copy for themselves." This is one of the best of illustrations of the power formerly enjoyed by

Historical Manuscripts Commission. the House of Lords. This rule accounts for the finding of King Charles the First's letters, taken at the Battle of Naseby, which any one may now see in cipher, and read in translation. So it also accounts for the fact that the original manuscript of the Book of Common Prayer, as appended to the Act of Uniformity, was, a few years ago, found among the muniments of the House of Lords. Here, too, is preserved the famous letter in which Charles I. threw his all too-faithful servant, the Earl of Strafford—of "Thorough" policy—to the Parliamentary lions. The whereabouts of this letter was not known for many years. It, as well as many another important document, was saved from destruction, in the great fire of the year 1834, by the exertion of a Mr. Stone Smith, then an officer of the House, as he was nearly 40 years later. He knew by tradition only of the value of the documents, which extend back to the year 1479.

I. 2

ENGLISH BIBLES.

III. 4 Among the documents of the year 1558 is a draft of "An Act for reducing the diversities of Bibles now extant in the English tongue to one settled vulgar translated from the original." This was to authorize the Archbishop of Canterbury and any five of the Bishops to arrange for the translation of the Scriptures, the cost of the work to be met by levies on "such cathedral churches and colleges as shall be thought requisite, and any temporal person may give gift or legacy for furtherance of the work." The English version, commonly spoken of as the "authorised," and with which all of us are familiar, dates from the year 1611.

INTERFERENCE WITH TRADE.

III. 5 Petitions of artisans against the importation of foreign goods; drafts of measures respecting the export of herrings and sea fish, free of duty, in vessels, with cross-sails; respecting "the making of glass by strangers and outlandish men"; against the retailing of linen cloth by aliens in London, or any borough or market town of England; regulating the trade of "tanners, curriers, shoemakers, and other artificers occupying the cutting of leather;"

III. 6 against buying fat cattle to sell them alive requiring dealers in London in second-hand clothes to report to one of the ordinary yeomen waiters, and hold possession for 16 days: these are among the curiosities of the legislation attempted in the 16th century.