

**EDWARD EDWARDS, THE
CHIEF
PIONEER OF MUNICIPAL
PUBLIC LIBRARIES**

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Edward Edwards, the chief pioneer of municipal public libraries by Thomas Greenwood

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THOMAS GREENWOOD

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BY

THOMAS GREENWOOD

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TO THE
FORGOTTEN BENEFACTORS
OF HUMANITY

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PREFACE.

THE preparation of this Appreciation of the work of Edward Edwards, and the Digest of his evidence before the several Parliamentary Committees, has been a labour of love. It has entailed a great deal of work and much unproductive research, and has left behind a feeling of having hewn away a small mountain to make a hillock, but the hillock was well worth making. Such biographical details as it has been possible to glean have been included, but these are of a scanty character. I have endeavoured to keep the volume within a reasonable limit. Edwards' life was of a simple and ordinary nature, and its interest with the reading public rests on his being the chief pioneer of the public library movement, and with such of his writings as are likely to have a permanent character. No history of the second half of the nineteenth century would be complete without due notice being taken of public libraries, the people's universities, and these are the outcome to an important degree of Edwards' earnest work and abiding enthusiasm on behalf of these institutions. The principal materials for this record have been found in his private diaries, which extend, so far as they have been discovered, throughout the following years: 1844 to 1852, 1854 to 1858, 1860 to 1868, 1870, 1881, 1882 and 1884, making twenty-seven in all. In the Manchester Public Reference Library there are batches of

correspondence addressed to Edwards ranging mainly from 1838 to 1869. So far as was practicable I have endeavoured to come into touch with those living who knew him, but these sources have not yielded much information. I have been enabled to acquire the remainder of his books, a number of them containing notes; a considerable amount of correspondence up to the time of his death; a number of note-books; the existing manuscript of the second edition of *Memoirs of Libraries*; guard-books full of memoranda and some other miscellaneous matters. The correspondence includes over ninety letters addressed to Edwards by his sisters. What is in my hands will, I hope, find an ultimate resting-place in the Manchester Public Reference Library. There are missing diaries and note-books, but the appearance of the present volume may lead to these being placed with the other material indicated.

The public library movement has many earnest friends, and this suggests two appropriate ways of perpetuating Edwards' name. An "Edward Edwards" Librarians' Home of Rest, at Niton, and an "Edward Edwards" Library School, which should be the headquarters of the Library Association and all other library organisations, as well as a centre for the municipal library world. If any generous friend of the cause, with the necessary means, will make either of these suggestions possible, all who have this movement at heart will be grateful. The Library Association will, I do not doubt, gladly take charge of any endowment for these purposes.

Librarians all over the country, in the Colonies of the Empire and in the United States, have shown the

warmest satisfaction with the efforts made to arouse a renewed interest in the work and writings of this man. The letters received by me, in acknowledgment of the receipt of the first volume of the second edition of the *Memoirs of Libraries* issued for presentation, were cheering and helpful.

To Dr. Richard Garnett, C.B., I am indebted for the active and sympathetic interest with which he has followed this undertaking throughout. He has also been good enough to read the proof sheets. To Mr. James Duff Brown, Librarian of the Finsbury Public Libraries, my thanks are given for the compilation of the index. I am grateful to those who have sent me letters received from Edwards.

Should this little volume serve in any measure to aid in securing for Edward Edwards the recognition due to his splendid services in the cause of education and librarianship, its sole purpose will be accomplished. His memory deserves to be held in everlasting remembrance among the great mass of users of municipal public libraries.

To Edwards I owe much of the stimulus which led to an increased activity in the public library movement. The year of his death saw the issue of my first writing upon the subject, and what then became to me an interesting hobby remains the same after the lapse of years. Edwards is to me as a library father, and if I can cultivate but a fraction of his enthusiasm and able advocacy of municipal libraries, I shall be content.

T. G.

FRITH KNOWL, ELSTREE,
HERTS, *April*, 1902.

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