

carried away with him. The family followed him to the Pagoda of Louï-pong. There he gave the promise that when the boy should win literary honours for his name and ancestors, he should see his mother once more; and having shown them Blanche in human form, he touched the pagoda with his wand, the whole structure moved aside, and Blanche sank into the stream flowing under it, which stream the pagoda covered again when he moved it back to its former site. This engineering business done, he sailed away in a cloud to his own Pagoda of the Mountain of Gold.

The son of Han-wen, as befitted the genius of literature, easily passed the three Government examinations, which in China are the opening to all official employment; and in the last of the three examinations, conducted by the Emperor himself, he was the highest, or "flower-crowned" student. The novel gives *verbatim* his petition, by which he obtained unpronounceable titles for his deceased mother, his father, uncle, and aunt. In reward for this filial piety, which is the Chinaman's ruling virtue and the moral of the book, the Pagoda of Louï-pong was once more moved aside, and he beheld his mother, the beautiful Blanche. The Buddhist Fa-hai declared

her faults all expiated now, and bidding her step upon a white scarf, he changed it into a white cloud, which carried her away to the skies. Han-wen's blue scarf was changed likewise to an azure cloud, and he followed her to the happy abode of Fo. Their son, before returning to the capital, married the daughter of Kong-fou, fulfilling the marriage engagement made before the birth of either. As we know they must have mourned in white for the death of Blanche long ago, it seems only a natural sequel when we are told now that the bride looked lovely on her wedding-day, and the bridegroom was dazzling in red, with "a black crêpe cap." And with an enumeration of the joys and honours that befel them in reward for their filial piety, we find ourselves at the last page of the Chinese novel—the last page, which in our reckoning would be none other than the first, since the books of that all-contrasting nation not only carry each printed line of word-letters downward in columns instead of across, but begin, like the Hebrew, at the right-hand cover, and invert our process of reading as well as our ideas, while we are travelling back to that last leaf which Westerns call the first.

SATURDAY NIGHT IN A FREE LIBRARY.



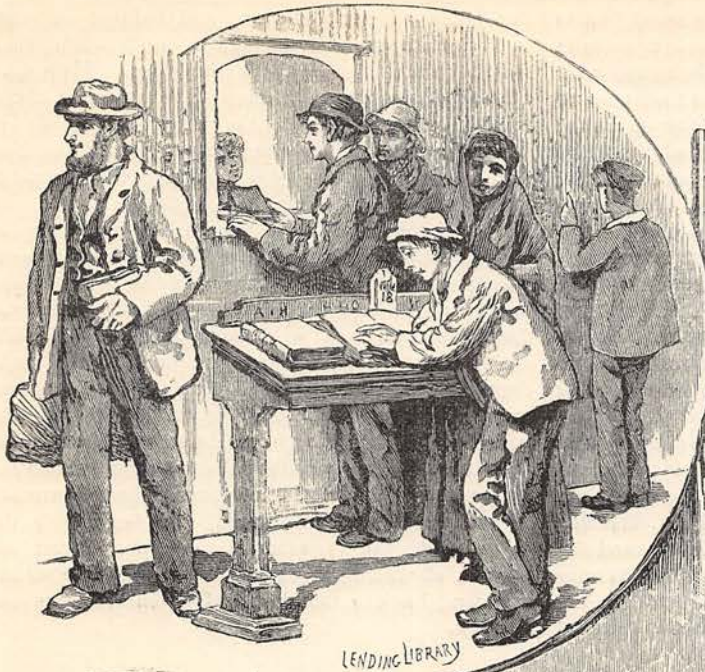
THE Free Libraries Act, passed in 1850, was the result of the report of a Committee of the House of Commons, appointed in 1849, on the motion of Mr. William Ewart —M.P. for Dumfries. It provided that two-thirds of the rate-payers of a borough, &c.,

should have power to authorise the levying of a rate for the purpose of maintaining a library that should be absolutely free, under certain specified conditions, to all comers. By a singular oversight, the Act, as first passed, did not give authority for the expenditure of a single farthing in the purchase of books, so that the first and most essential outlay in connection with a library had to be provided for by public subscription, till the amended Act of 1855 remedied the omission, and gave sundry other facilities for the better working of the measure, including an increase in the amount of rate from one halfpenny to a penny in the pound. Prior to the passing of the Act there was but one Public Library in England open to all who chose to

use it, namely, the "Chetham Library" in Manchester, founded in 1653, by the piety and spirit of Humphrey Chetham, of whom Fuller has given an interesting account in his "Worthies of England." The Chetham Library, which still flourishes, can claim to have been the first institution of the kind in Europe, freely accessible to all classes of the community, without distinction of rank.

Manchester was the first town to avail itself of the provisions of the Act of Parliament, and its example was very soon followed by Liverpool. Since then libraries have been provided for free public use in about one hundred towns; and it is worthy of remark that, with comparatively few exceptions, these institutions are to be found solely in districts inhabited by populations engaged in manufacturing and other industrial occupations.

The working of a Free Library under ordinary conditions can best be seen if we visit it on Saturday evening, the busiest time of the whole week. That which we select for the purpose has been in operation only a few years, and is situated in a manufacturing town of about 25,000 inhabitants. To what extent the boon is appreciated, and the class of visitors by whom the library is frequented, we shall see as we enter the various rooms and watch the proceedings. On the left of the entrance hall is a spacious reading-room, lighted from the top by day, where, on stands fixed round the room, are copies of the London and provincial daily press, while large tables are liberally supplied with other papers and periodicals. Many of these, we learn, are free gifts, the proprietors of several valuable



PORTION OF "COTCREAVE" INDICATOR

LAW	SCIENCE	FICTION	HISTORY	ART
1A	1B	1C	1D	1E
2A	2B	2C		2E
3A	3B		3D	3E
4A			4D	
5A		5C	5D	
	6B		6D	
7A	7B	7C	7D	
	8B	8C	8D	
9A	9B	9C	9	
10A	10B	10C	10	

4
F
INCHES



READING ROOM



REFERENCE LIBRARY

SATURDAY NIGHT IN A FREE LIBRARY.

weekly and monthly publications generously posting copies as issued, while others are supplied by the liberality of residents. In this way the resources of the Free Library committee are supplemented to a considerable extent. As we enter, the weekly market in the streets outside is crowded, and the shops are in full work; but the reading-room is notwithstanding well filled during the entire evening, chiefly by men and youths who have been employed during the day in the factories of the town.

Leaving the reading-room on our left, we turn next to the lending department of the library, and find the whole of one side of the lobby occupied by a rack, covered with glass. This is the "Indicator," an ingenious contrivance by which visitors may see at a glance whether any particular book is in or out. In the latter case a small ticket is seen on a tiny shelf, behind the glass, against the number of the volume. This ticket, as we learn afterwards, belongs to the person who has taken out that particular book, and is kept on the numbered shelf, visible to the public, but of course out of reach, till the book is returned. An entry made on the ticket at the time of issue shows when the book was borrowed, and enables the librarian or his assistant to see at a glance what fine has been incurred if not returned punctually. The books are issued at a small opening, not unlike that of a railway ticket-window, in the centre of the glazed partition. Entering by the courtesy of the librarian, we obtain an insight into the internal arrangement of the place. The library is small compared with some in larger towns, having only about 6,000 volumes in the lending department. These are divided into ten classes as follows:—A, Theology and Philosophy; B, Biography; C, History, Travels, and Topographical Works; D, Law and Politics; E, Arts and Sciences; F, Fiction; G, Poetry and the Drama; H, Miscellaneous Works; I, Magazines; J, Juvenile Literature.

Of these classes, as may be supposed, that devoted to fiction is by far the largest, and above fifty per cent. of the works issued are on the average drawn from that class. The next most popular section appears to be that devoted to bound volumes of magazines, while the issues from Class J are also very large. Curious to know what kind of reading is provided for the boys and girls, who hold readers' tickets in great numbers, we examine the shelves devoted to juvenile literature, and we find the works of the late Mr. Kingston largely represented, together with several hundreds of other tales for the young, which are exceedingly popular, as their well-thumbed condition abundantly testifies. Several interesting facts relating to the issue of fiction are stated by the librarian. We learn with some surprise, not unmixed with satisfaction, that the works of two or three well-known writers, usually regarded as among the most sensational of their class, are seldom or never asked for. On the other hand, those of two lady story-writers, familiar to readers of certain religious papers, are in such demand that, even with four or five copies of each work, it is impossible to supply all applicants. Many readers, indeed, appear unwilling to venture on any other

author, and if there are none of ———'s or ———'s books in they will carry off their tickets in disgust. Lord Beaconsfield's works had remained upon the shelves in slight request until the author's death, when for a little time the demand was enormous. The worthy people of the Black Country, however, seem to find these works too abstruse or else too political for their taste, as in the great majority of cases the books were brought back in a day or two with a request for "something more interesting."

Magazines, as we have said, are in considerable demand, and we are pleased to note signs of continuous "wear and tear" in the few volumes of the *QUIVER* and of *CASSELL'S FAMILY MAGAZINE* that chance to be on the shelf at the time of our visit. It is no infrequent occurrence to have every copy of the former cleared out on Saturday nights in anticipation of the next day's reading. Next to the three classes named above, but at a considerable distance, that devoted to works of history and travels seems to be in demand, followed closely by that allotted to the arts and sciences, inquiry for which is greatly stimulated by the classes held in connection with the library during the winter months, for the study of mathematics, geology, drawing, physiology, chemistry, machine construction, &c. Biography, strange to say, seems to be in comparatively little request, and poetry is still less popular. Class A is drawn upon but slightly, and chiefly by persons well known as workers in the Sunday school or as occasional lay preachers.

Passing from the lending department, we next enter the Reference Library, a room containing about 1,500 volumes, fairly well selected. Of cyclopædias, dictionaries, and other works appropriate to such a library, the supply is good, but a large portion of the shelves is occupied by illustrated and other periodicals. Youths of fourteen years of age and upwards are permitted to use this room, and every visitor in applying for a book has to fill up a form, giving its title, his name, age, occupation, and address. From these forms the librarian is able to present at the end of the year a report giving in detail the ages and employments of readers. This report shows that youths under twenty largely predominate. Of "occupations," as given by the readers themselves, there are some singular examples. The following, for instance, are all classified by the librarian under the generic name of "ironworkers," but are the peculiar descriptions which certain young readers give of their employments in the different works:—"Heaver-up," "drawer-out," "carry-staples," "pipe-carrier," "helper," "cutter-down," "catching at the rolls," "hardner," "cutter-off," and "straightener," the last-named being also variously spelled "straghtener" and "straitoner." A considerable number, the times being bad, describe themselves as "nothing;" "laburying" is interpreted to mean "labourer," and "schoalour" is supposed to be a backward lad at the Board school. The full list of occupations shows that most trades and professions are represented among the readers, publicans being very low in the list, while clerks and pupil-teachers are so numerous as to suggest that the more intelligent

young men of the town find the library a real boon to them, and use it freely in their efforts after self-improvement.

Before we leave, the librarian calls our attention to a very heavy item in the financial statement included in the report. Although the total income from the rates is less than £250 a year, nearly £50 have to be expended in binding, an outlay largely attributable to the carelessness with which books are used both in the Reference Library and at the homes of borrowers. Cases of wilful damage are believed to be exceedingly

rare; but comparatively few of those for whose special benefit Free Libraries are designed seem yet to have learned to appreciate books as they ought. Probably this evil will to a large extent be remedied as time rolls on. Meanwhile it is interesting to stand in the crowded lobby and watch the eagerness with which the visitors swarm round the window, through which three assistants are engaged issuing books as fast as they can possibly be entered, till the closing hour of nine brings a welcome and much-needed end to the labours of the day.

FREDERIC WAGSTAFF.

HOW TO COOK POTATOES.

BY A. G. PAYNE, AUTHOR OF "COMMON-SENSE COOKERY."



HERE is generally a great deal of truth in old proverbs, and the one that says that "it requires a good cook to cook a steak and boil a potato," is no exception to the rule. The various methods of cooking potatoes are almost infinite, but I do not think I am guilty of exaggeration in saying that by far the most

difficult method of all is to boil a potato—*properly*. At the present season of the year, the roast beef of Old England, red and juicy, has special claims upon us all; though with the progress of time Old England has to a great extent given way to the importations of America and even Australia. Still it is good genuine beef; and I think those who regard us as barbarians for eating potatoes with our meat, would do well to consider what would our Christmas sirloin be without its constant companion, the white, floury potato, white as snow, firm, and yet one that crumbles to pieces when touched even lightly with a fork, for he indeed would be worse than barbarian that attempted to *cut* a potato.

Comparisons are, as a rule, best avoided; but the French have so much in their favour in everything that relates to cookery, that we may for one moment contrast the *filet de bœuf aux pommes de terre frites*, with the old-fashioned English rump-steak and floury potato. Both are good, and I will try and give both their due. First the French fillet. Beautifully tender, but then there is a suspicion that some of the goodness, and even flavour, has been knocked out of it, still for tender teeth this is undoubtedly a great point in its favour. On the top is a small pat of half-melted butter, like rich cream, to which some chopped parsley has been added, and which gives a sort of finish to the dish, while round the fillet repose those light brown slices of potato, which require so much caution in eating, owing to the cook having mastered the art of frying—viz., heating the fat far above the temperature of boiling water. It is a dish by no means to be despised, and after a long journey abroad is the safest one to order.

Now for our own rump-steak. Cooked to a turn on

a gridiron, and placed on a plate scorching hot. The steak coloured outside like a freshly-polished old dark Spanish mahogany table. Attached to the steak is a rim of rich yellow fat, at least an inch and a half thick, just slightly browned here and there; for steak, my French friend, is worth nothing without fat, and how often do you bear this in mind? Is there one thing left to make the English steak win the day? Even while we wait, a streak of bright, clear, red gravy runs out upon the plate, soon to be absorbed by the floury potatoes that complete the picture; and if the steak be tender, and a deep red when cut—not blue—and the appetite good, no better meal in my opinion can be found, however far we may travel from home.

Is it possible to describe how to get a potato into this state of perfection? I admit it is a very difficult thing to do, the more so as potatoes now undoubtedly are not what they were many years ago.

First, then, how about boiling the potatoes in their jackets? If you consult cookery books on this subject you will be overwhelmed with arguments, medical and scientific, and which seem also common-sense arguments. The latter, by-the-by, does not always follow from the former. I bow meekly to these arguments, as I should were one to argue in favour of corduroy *versus* cloth; I admit the corduroy to be more durable, more economical, admirably warm for winter wear, &c., but for all that I don't buy any. If some of our great men brought corduroy into fashion, I would readily follow. We are to a great extent bound to study fashion, as beyond a certain point we should be put down as eccentric. I believe that potatoes are best cooked in their skins; I cannot recommend the method on the ground of appearance.

Old potatoes should be put into cold water, and new potatoes into boiling water; and just as it is impossible to say at what precise moment a potato ceases to be new and becomes old, so it is equally impossible to say what temperature the water should be between these two extremes for potatoes that are neither new nor old.

It is impossible to give an exact receipt for boiling potatoes, as time and temperature vary with the size and age. It is, however, quite possible to explain the