

CHILDREN'S LIBRARIES IN AMERICA

BY CHARLOTTE O'CONNOR ECCLES.

FREE public libraries are a distinctive feature of municipal life in America, and are used by all classes of the community to an extent unusual here. In the United States such institutions often become social as well as literary centres. We hear in certain towns—in Cleveland, Ohio, for example—of an attractive portion of the reference-room in the local library being set aside as a “Club Corner,” to which members of the many literary and other clubs in the city

States is too little in evidence amongst adults. It will be a long time before the members of English clubs of any grade devote a portion of their leisure to research, though now and then for purely professional purposes an author or would-be author goes to the British Museum to look up a reference or seek fresh material. Nor do ordinary citizens and their wives form circles, and reading classes, and unions for the study of this or that, as is customary



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CHILDREN'S LIBRARY, CLEVELAND, OHIO.

[Stebbins, Boston.

come for study. The topics set down for discussion on the programmes of these clubs are looked up in advance, the references written on cards, and filed in boxes, a box being devoted to each club. This method systematises and facilitates work, both for the department and for the clubs. No fewer than twenty-six of these associations in Cleveland received special assistance during the year ending August, 1898.

In the British Islands the thirst for information so noticeable in the United

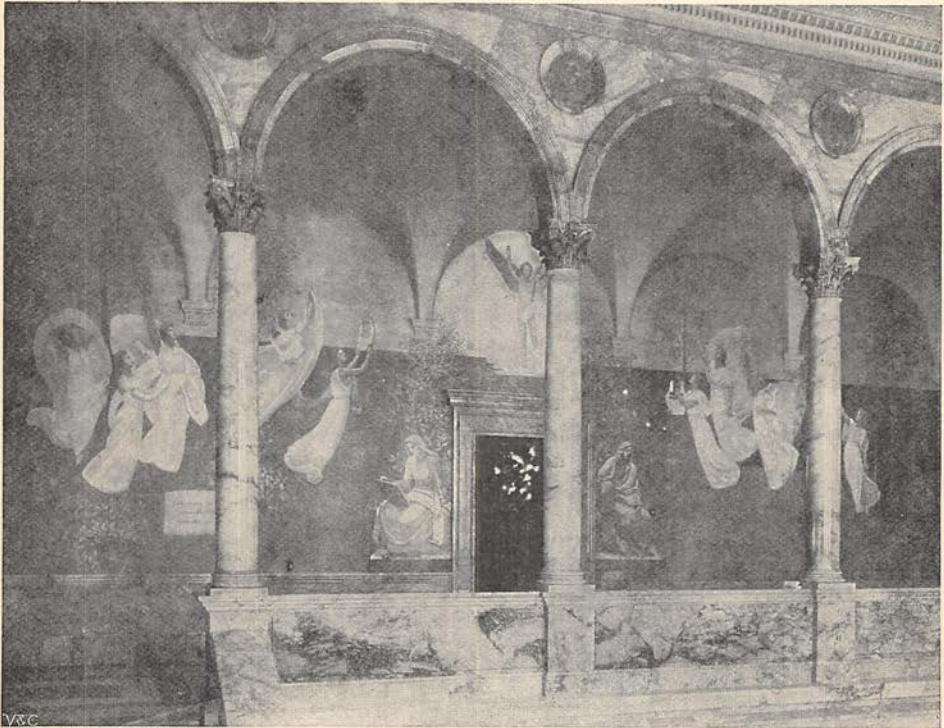
States is too little in evidence amongst adults, where culture, if superficial, is wide.

American libraries are crowded on Sundays and holidays as well as on week-days; indeed, it stands to reason that on Sundays and holidays alone are many readers able to avail themselves of the advantages offered; and the Yankees, strong Sabbatharians though most of them are, do not understand a system by which the owners of public-houses alone are permitted to open their doors on the Lord's Day, when all other traders must

close their doors, and when libraries are given over to dust and silence.

Amongst the largest and most interesting libraries on "the other side" is that at Boston, Mass., with its ten branches having independent collections of books, and its seventeen delivery stations. It was originally founded by Joshua Bates, a native of Massachusetts who migrated to London and became the head of Baring's Bank. In his prosperity he did not forget his native place, and sent over fifty thousand dollars, besides books to the same amount, for the benefit of

rejected by the population, and give the reason why, state particulars as to the styles, shapes, colours, or patterns which find most favour, and forecast a demand likely to arise for cottons, or dress materials, or hardware, or glass, or machinery. If a new railway is projected in some half-civilised land, the nearest American consul is prompt to send home the news, so that tenders from American manufacturers may be early in the field. He indicates the wants, prejudices, or beliefs of the people, so that designs in conformity with their tastes or needs may alone



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MURAL DECORATIONS BY DE CHAVANNES, BOSTON FREE LIBRARY.

[Curtis & Co.

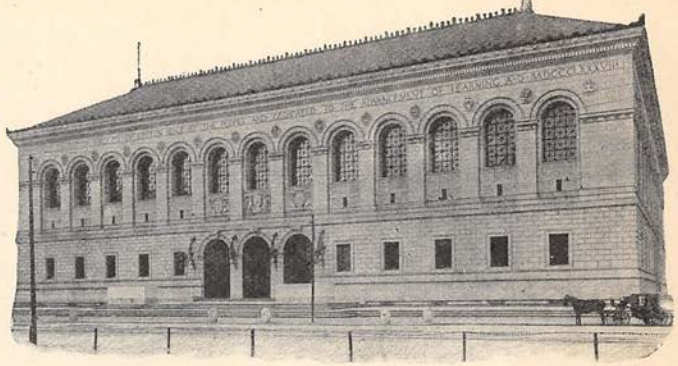
Boston city. Of course, the present magnificent building is very different from that first erected. It was opened in 1895, and includes a notable and novel department devoted to reports from American consuls and vice-consuls throughout the world. These gentlemen are primarily concerned in the advancement of American commerce, so they collect valuable information on all subjects concerned therewith. They enter into the minutest details as to the state of the markets at any given time in the countries where they are stationed, note what goods are required, and what others are

be submitted, and his prompt action spares his countrymen many useless endeavours to carry coals to Newcastle. By studying these consular reports, which are classified and open to all, the American trader can see at a glance where his particular wares are in demand, and where they would be superfluous; moreover, he can adapt those wares to a standard not his own, for he believes in giving people what they like, not what he himself prefers.

In the public libraries of the United States, lectures are delivered on various subjects of popular interest, books are sent round to

the schools for the use of teachers and pupils, and volumes specially chosen are circulated at the mothers' club meetings held at some of the schools in certain towns. These sets contain books on the care and training of children, on cookery, house-keeping, house planning and building, sanitation, hygiene, and similar subjects specially suited to the needs of working women. Such books are largely read by women who, because of household cares and duties, do not use the libraries, and they have led to the establishment in several of the school buildings of regular delivery stations for their neighbourhood. At such stations, as will have been gathered from their name, books may be exchanged that have been read at home, and residents in outlying districts are thus spared the trouble and loss of time that would be involved in a journey to the central library.

We have said that American libraries supply books to the local schools for the use



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BOSTON PUBLIC FREE LIBRARY.

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of teachers and pupils. This branch of work has naturally led to the establishment in most towns of a children's library, which, according to the size and importance of the district, varies from a mere slice partitioned off from the general reading-room, to a special department consisting usually of a spacious reading-room and a reference-room, with cloak-rooms and lavatories. The tendency is all towards a special department; for as a children's library grows in popularity,



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CHILDREN'S ROOM, BOSTON PUBLIC LIBRARY.

[Stebbins, Boston.]



Photo by]

[Stebbins, Boston.

CHILDREN'S LIBRARY, MEDFORD, SUBURB OF BOSTON.

of little people of different degrees of politeness, culture, and social standing meet on common ground, are liable occasionally to disturb the older readers, who are glad to have the boys and girls relegated to a place of their own, where they come under the direct observation of special librarians appointed to take charge of the department, who gently enforce good behaviour, orderly habits, care of books, cleanliness, and many other of the minor virtues. Some encouraging instances of their influence for good have come to the knowledge of the Board of Education, especially in connection with the splendid Pratt Institute in Brooklyn. More than one

the patter of small feet coming and going, the restlessness and whispering of the less disciplined youngsters, and the childish disputes which may arise where a number

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Photo by]

[Stebbins, Boston.

THE CHILDREN'S ROOM, MEDFORD.

lad has been rescued from the evils of slum life, and, thanks to talent shown for drawing, or mathematics, or engineering, has been put in the way of gaining an honourable livelihood.

The privilege of choosing their own books, which is general throughout the States, is much appreciated by the little folks, who delight above all things in having the run of a library. The obvious difficulty which will suggest itself with regard to the possibility of boys and girls coming across, matter unsuitable for the young is met by taking

travel, biography, adventure, elementary natural science, and history is provided. Fairy tales are in great demand; but the older children, when interested in any historical character, or when studying for an examination, are often glad to supplement lessons given in school by reading up books on special subjects. It need scarcely be said that the librarians afford every help to these young students.

Young people under the age of sixteen are free to use the children's room, and may come as often as they like, taking down



CHILDREN'S ROOM, PUBLIC FREE LIBRARY, OHIO.

precautions to eliminate all works of doubtful tendency from the literature provided for the children's room. In Boston some twenty ladies and gentlemen of different religious denominations, unconnected with the management of the library, undertake to read new books and report on them before they are circulated, giving reasons for their decision as to merits or demerits. Should opinions be divided, the library authorities have the casting vote. All sectarian, or controversial, or pessimistic works are rejected, but abundance of wholesome fiction,

volumes from the shelves at their own sweet will, on the condition that when leaving they shall restore every book to the place from which they took it. All those who have attained the age of twelve may secure a reader's ticket, which enables them to take home one or more books, which must not, however, be kept beyond a specified time, usually a fortnight. The holder is liable to pay a fine if a book is injured or unduly detained, and if the book is lost, is required to replace it. This seldom happens; indeed, the care taken by the children is remarkable.



CHILDREN'S ROOM, SCORVILLE INSTITUTE LIBRARY, OAK PARK, ILLINOIS:
FIREPLACE DECORATED FOR "THANKSGIVING."

laneous collection of prints and engravings, cut for the most part from books or the illustrated papers, is posted. These give a pictorial narrative of the fight. Portraits of commanders on both sides are shown, views of the country where the battle was fought, scenes connected with it, showing stirring incidents such as the storming of a position, the capture of a flag, and so on. One of the librarians supplies in connection with these a certain amount of type-

A reader's ticket is furnished at the request of a parent, guardian, or teacher. "Pupil's cards" are issued to children of ten years of age and upwards who may require to use books of reference, but these are given only at the request of a teacher.

In certain of the children's libraries national festival days are honoured in a special fashion.

When, for example, a public holiday, such as Christmas, Easter, or Thanksgiving Day, is drawing near, an account of it is posted on the bulletin-board that forms an important article of furniture in every children's library. A list of books relating to it is made out, and any pictures that refer to it and that are obtainable, or photographs of such pictures, are exhibited. A great deal of history is also taught in this way. When, for example, the anniversary of a celebrated battle comes round, a miscel-

written matter to render the pictures intelligible to all, and refers the children who are desirous of further information to those books on their shelves dealing with the event or period in question. The birthdays of great men—Shakespeare, Milton, Newton, Laplace, Washington—furnish an occasion for showing their portraits, referring to their

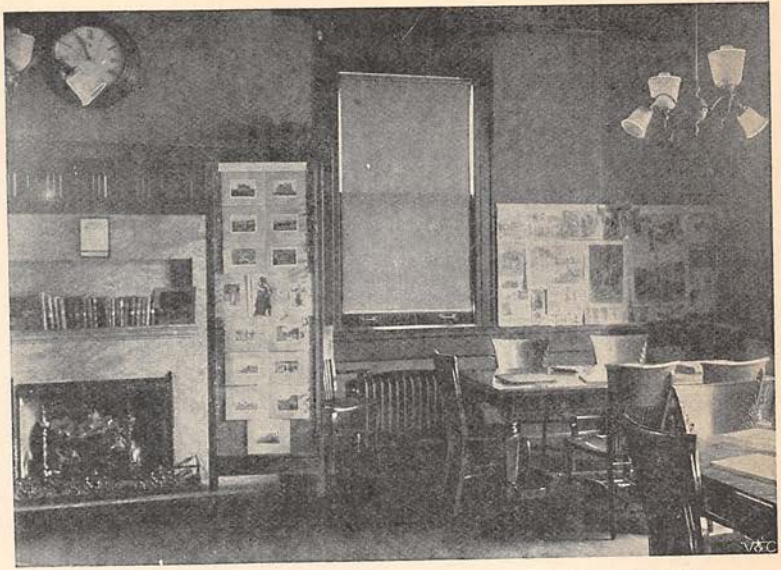


Photo by]

[Stebbins, Boston.

CHILDREN'S ROOM, BUFFALO PUBLIC LIBRARY.

plays, poems, discoveries, virtues, or conquests, and familiarising young readers with their works or their deeds. Sometimes portraits of contemporary writers are given, with short biographical notices attached, especially at a time when some volume like "The Just So Stories" is in high favour, and when the older children are consequently anxious to hear all about the man or the woman who wrote it. The children in many places are encouraged to arrange exhibits of their own—flowers, plants, or the leaves of forest trees, neatly labelled and described. For the best of these, prizes are offered. Successful



CHILDREN'S ROOM, MICHIGAN CITY PUBLIC FREE LIBRARY, INDIANA.

exhibits have been given of original drawings for book illustration and book-cover design.

Information of all kinds intended to be



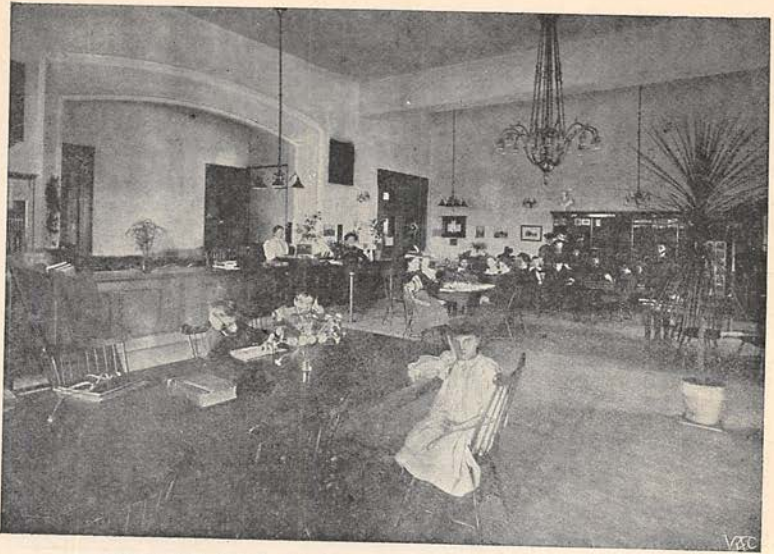
Photo by]

[Stebbins, Boston.

CHILDREN'S READING-ROOM, PRATT INSTITUTE LIBRARY, RYERSON STREET, BROOKLYN.

conveyed to the children is posted on the bulletin-board, the first thing to which each youngster turns on arriving. New rules, lists of new books and magazines, notices of volumes lost or mislaid, and so on, find a place there.

Thanks to the kindness of Miss M. S. R. James, formerly librarian at the People's Palace in London, and now attached to the Library Association in Boston, we are enabled to lay before our readers a unique collection of photographs of children's libraries in various towns in the United States. That in Boston consists of two large and lofty rooms, of which one is used for reading, and the other as a reference library. The former is lighted in the daytime by two long windows, and at night by electricity. The spiral iron staircases behind the entrance door lead to a gallery that runs all round and is furnished with rows of bookshelves. It will be observed that even the highest rows are accessible to the children. On the walls are hung beautiful and instructive solar prints of famous buildings throughout the world—St. Mark's at Venice, Notre Dame, the Palace of the Doges, and others. These form a permanent exhibit, but in other places the photographs and engravings used to adorn the children's room are varied from time to time. Nor do they invariably consist of architectural subjects, as in Boston. They are frequently copies of world-renowned paintings, or are taken from sculptures such as The Laocöon and the Apollo Belvedere. Now and again they are drawings of familiar wild flowers, or native birds, or wild animals. The children are encouraged to ask questions with regard to any of them, and always find the librarians helpful. The friendliest relations are established in a short time between these ladies and gentlemen and the boy and girl readers. Very often when the latter have reached the age limit, and are relegated to the general reading-room, they beg per-



CHILDREN'S ROOM, MILWAUKEE PUBLIC LIBRARY, WISCONSIN.

mission to come back at intervals for guidance in their reading, or for the elucidation of difficult passages met with in some master's works.

The two views which we give of the Children's Library at Medford, Mass., are particularly interesting, because they show the "midget" furniture, specially designed for the use of small children by the Library Bureau. It will be seen that the walls are adorned by pictures of native American birds, which the youngsters speedily learn to know, an advantage for the town-bred. Different aspects of the same apartment are shown in the photographs. Medford is outside Boston, and this room, bright, airy and well ventilated, is on the upper floor.

In Cleveland, Ohio, of whose children's reading-room we give a charming illustration supplied to Miss James by Miss Eastman, a club-room is fitted up in the South Side Branch Library, which was occupied regularly each week during a recent winter by two children's clubs, one organised by Miss Granger, the branch librarian, for the study of famous localities in England in connection with their history, and the other of somewhat younger children organised by Miss Jacobs, the senior assistant, for the study of American history. There were about sixty-five children in each class, who maintained interest and attendance throughout the season.

In connection with most children's libraries a Library League has been formed, to band the little readers together and secure thereby the better care of the books. In

some libraries, especially such as are situated in poor neighbourhoods, each child is required on entering to repair to the well-appointed lavatory and there wash his or her hands before taking down a volume. This rule soon becomes a habit. Paper book-marks are supplied in connection with the "League," some bearing on them a fable or a short story having for its moral the need for so treating books that have given the reader pleasure as to ensure that these may continue to give pleasure to others. As a specimen of a mark, one may mention that in use at Cleveland. It bears the motto of the Library League: "Clean hearts, clean hands, clean books." These book-marks are infinitely varied, and some are very entertaining.

In the Milwaukee Children's Room, which is very attractive, a notice is affixed to the wall: "This Room is under the protection of the Boys and Girls of Milwaukee." It was opened in the autumn of 1898, and the rapid increase in the number of borrowers, the growing desire to read better books, and the quiet, orderly conduct of the young people are a source of pride and pleasure to the energetic librarians.

Special efforts have been made to reach the class of children who have no chance of spending their holidays in the country or at the seaside. The following circular was issued one summer by Mr. W. H. Brett, Head Librarian at Cleveland:—

"To the Boys and Girls of the Cleveland Schools.

"You are cordially invited to visit frequently during your long summer vacation the Public Library, or the Branch which is nearest to your home.

"You will find there, in the thousands of books and pictures collected for your use, a great source of entertainment and pleasure. The cool, quiet Library is a place to remember and go to when it is too hot and dusty to play out of doors; and if you cannot get to the woods and fields, an interesting book is the best thing to help you to forget the heat and discomfort of such days.

"If you have no card to draw books on, ask for one at the Library. There is no charge for a card, and it costs nothing to read there, or to draw books to take home, so long as one keeps the rules, which are easy to learn and remember.

"We wish you a pleasant vacation, and hope that the Library may help to make it so for you."

The Pratt Institute, Ryerson Street, Brooklyn, to which we have referred before, is one of the largest and most successful institutions of its kind in the States.

If space permitted, we should be glad to go into details of the educational and social work done by these valuable institutions in

America; but this is impossible. The effect that they have already had in civilising the very roughest of the juvenile population, in promoting courtesy, forbearance, cleanliness, good temper, and readiness to oblige, amongst those who through the ignorance or indifference of their parents have no good influences brought to bear upon them in their homes, and the effect that well-chosen books have exerted on those who read them, cannot be over-estimated.



CHILDREN'S ROOM, EVANSTOWN FREE LIBRARY.