

wanted about £1,600. Mr. Edwards had promised to start the library with a present of 1,000 volumes, and other promises of books had been made. Earl Nelson also urged the claims of the district to a free library, and appealed for funds for its equipment.

**LONDON : STREATHAM.**—The Earl of Dunraven, on June 30th, opened a new branch in connection with the Streatham Public Libraries, which has been erected in Ramsden Road, Balham, mainly through the munificence of Sir Henry Tate, who, with Lady Tate, attended the ceremony. Lord Dunraven commented on the large circulation of works of fiction over books of a more serious character, and said the novel must not be under-estimated on that account. The greatest test of the novel was the rapidity of its circulation, but the same rule did not apply to philosophic works. Many books which came under the character of romances contained an enormous amount of solid information, and he was not quite sure that if volumes were arranged automatically some of the historical works would not come under the same category as fiction.

**PERTH.**—Lord Rosebery has fixed October 26th for his visit to Perth, when he is to open the Sandeman Public Library and to be presented with the freedom of the burgh. His Lordship, in a letter addressed to the Town Council, stipulated that a long speech is not to be expected of him, on account of his having many other engagements about that time.

## Correspondence.

### OPEN ACCESS TO PUBLIC LIBRARIES.

#### *To the Editor of THE LIBRARY.*

DEAR SIR,—Will you kindly allow me to enter my protest against the above system. In my opinion it is a most unbusinesslike principle, as it tends to create disorder where in above any other place order ought to be predominant.

It was tried for about three years at this Library, and in the end it proved to be one of the greatest nuisances we ever had to contend with. When I read the matter which the advocates of the open access have advanced, I notice that a deal of stress is laid on the word *liberty* of the people to approach their own books, *liberty* of the people to examine them to their own satisfaction, and other nonsensical invectives. The following are a few of the evils that I had to contend with:—Books were stolen—the system has a tendency for theft. If people will steal such little petty things as *Tit-Bits* and such-like from the public reading-room when thirty or forty people are present, is it not likely that they will steal something of more value, when the chances of being caught are so much less?

Take a vast number of our provincial libraries that can only afford a librarian and assistant, and the assistant very young, when the chief is called away, or during the changes of meal hours, it is then a very easy matter for those of thieving propensities to take what they want.

We found it impracticable for want of space; for open access you require a library twice the original size, otherwise it is a veritable bear garden, and funds are not forthcoming to provide that space.

Books were worn out and made filthy in half the time they ought to have been, not so much by honest wear, as by the curiosity of opening them, and instead of them being put in their proper place, it almost took one to keep putting the books in their right places.

The furniture and the general surroundings are very uninviting, through the former being kicked and clambered on, and the great amount of dirt and dust caused thereby. The system means extra staff and less practical work done.

The library becomes a nice meeting place for other purposes than changing books. When the clique and social circle get together, then you have a fine old time of it, you really wonder where you are, as to whether you are in a library, or at a gossiping afternoon tea fight. As to a librarian's work that requires special care, it is almost out of the question, unless he happens to have a private room, and then he will have to lock himself inside.

The office of librarianship is turned more to that of a railway porter. You are constantly being asked all kinds of silly questions—quite equal to what time does the 10.40 a.m. train go to Muddleton, forgetting that they are there.

It tends more to cater for the classes than the masses. Why? Because of the favouritism they ask for over and above working men and women, they are better educated, and in consequence they are able to perceive the regulations, &c., in the library more quickly, that they get the best and newest books.

Whenever this open access is advocated, it is nearly always trotted out that students can see better what they want. Why all this philanthropic advocacy to the student in a public library? Are the students of science, art, or any other subject, the great number to be considered most? I would like to know where their claim comes in so much, when the issue of fiction alone is bordering on 80 per cent., the remaining 20 per cent. being divided in seven or eight other classes.

I suppose I shall be put down as a sort of commission agent for indicator makers, and fully expect to be "Browned," "Cartered," and "Jasted," but this will make no difference to my testimony against a system, which in my opinion, is impracticable in over 90 per cent. of our libraries.

In conclusion, I agree with the idea that outside fiction a borrower should be allowed to satisfy himself that the book he has asked for is satisfactory for the purposes he wants before it is charged out to him; it causes a little extra labour, but in nine cases out of ten it can be done, and it is far more satisfying to the borrower than when he gets home, after almost wasting a night, finds that the book is no good whatever for the object he has in view.

As a warning to librarians thinking of recommending open access, I would strongly urge upon them to carefully consider the question, otherwise they may embark on what they think is a smooth sea, but will afterwards find out, to their own regret, that in consequence of the storm and the choppy billows there will be great difficulty in keeping afloat.

I am, Dear Sir,  
Yours faithfully,  
JOHN CHORTON.

*Borough of Hyde Public Free Library.*

[Mr. Chorton's letter extended to nearly 5 folio pages of MS., and I have only been able to find room for the more important parts. I must beg writers on this topic to be brief, and to stick to the point, which I take to be open access as worked at places like Clerkenwell, Croydon,