THE MORNING

—THE NEED FOR A

CATALOGUE.

BY A CORRESPONDENT

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THE MORNING POST, FRIDAY, JANUARY 29,

BRITISH MUSEUM LIBRARY.

I.—THE NEED FOR A SUBJECT CATALOGUE.

BY A CORRESPONDENT.

The Library of the British Museum has had, and still has, so much to recommend it when it is compared with the other national libraries of Europe, that, as might be expected, there are now signs of stagnation. The work of the previous directors, associated particularly with the name of Panizzi, has brought its administration up to such a pitch of excellence that a Museum tradition has been formulated and has stiffened, and the authorities appear to be resting content with an efficiency considerably inferior to that of the great national library of the United States in Washington. And with the progress of time and the increasing complexity of the collection, the faults that in the early days of the Museum were mere blemishes, are now becoming so conspicuous as to demand a special inquiry.

The constitution of the Museum and the method of appointment of its staff is peculiar, harking back to the Georgian period, when it was the habit for work of national administration to be vested in such personalities as the Archbishop of Canterbury, the Lord Chancellor, and the Speaker of the House of Commons. The Trustees, forty-nine in all, are of four classes, one Royal Trustee, nine Family Trustees (they originate from such great donations as the Richard Payne Knight collection), twenty-four Official Trustees, including the Archbishop of Canterbury, the Speaker of the House of Commons, the Lord Chancellor, and the chief Secretaries of State, and fifteen elected or co-opted trustees. The British Museum is, in fact, a close corporation. The narrowness of the constitution is accentuated still further by the methods of its working. A standing committee of the Trustees meets frequently to transact business, and exercises a control that is far from nominal. While the Director and the heads of departments have considerably greater freedom than the Director of the National Gallery, the administration is still far too much in the hands of those who have not the special knowledge that is required for their work. Thus the Director is the only official who attends the meetings of the Trustees. The chiefs of departments never appear except when their presence is specifically required. The bad effect of this on the Library can be imagined, when it is pointed out that, though the Library is one of the most important departments of the Museum, no Director has been chosen from the department of printed books for over twenty years. Nor has the Museum the advantage of Parliamentary criticism, for there is no Minister in Parliament responsible. Lord Morley has usually been in charge of any Bill which the Trustees have promoted, and the Treasury has usually accepted responsibility.

Library Appointments.

The narrowness of the constitution and the evils that result from it are closely reflected in the method of appointment to the Library staff. An applicant for a post in the Library must almost invariably be a graduate of Oxford or Cambridge, and it is of little use for him to apply for a post unless he has taken an Honours School. Before being examined for the appointment he must secure a nomination from either the Archbishop of Canterbury, the Lord Chancellor, or the Speaker of the House of Commons. In view of present-day requirements, it would be difficult to imagine a more unfortunate method of selection. It provides the Library with scholars, notable scholars in fact, with the rather narrow outlook, however, almost inevitably associated with scholarship, but not with librarians. The University graduate, despite his knowledge of books, is quite ignorant of librarianship, which would not be a serious evil if the Museum were competent to train him to his work. But he and his predecessors are like the torch-bearers in the race, handing from one to another the original inspiration of Panizzi, and the requirements of to-day are vastly different from the requirements of the Sixties. If the librarianship of the British Museum is to be worthy of the Library, some of the staff at any rate should be chosen from those who have had outside training and outside experience. With a sufficient leavening of such men, the University graduate, if it is thought desirable still to engage University men, could be taught his work. America has shown the working out of this idea. In the United States, as was pointed out in a paper read before a recent meeting of the Library Association, there is a hierarchy of librarianship, the magnificent library at Washington being at the summit, while small municipal libraries form the broad base on which the most highly skilled librarianship in the world is supported. In America the assistant at a muni-

cipal library specialises in classification or in a similar subject; he gets promoted to be assistant at a larger library, and becomes chief of one library after another; it is only from men who have proved themselves to be of conspicuous ability, after years of experience in libraries of all sorts and sizes, and with all sorts of needs, that the Library at Washington is recruited. When such a man reaches Washington his instincts are the reverse of bureaucratic; he has attained success because he has shown conspicuous energy and ability, and he is in a position to compare and criticise and to add a substantial quota to the experience which the Library has at its command. The British Museum gains no new library experience; since Panizzi initiated his great reforms his successors have been carrying them out. Whereas other libraries lay stress on the importance of librarianship, and assistants in these libraries attend classes, sit for examinations, and ultimately take the diploma of the Library Association in librarianship, the British Museum asks nothing but scholarship of its new men.

The several disabilities under which the British Museum suffers are in the main due to the causes which have been already mentioned, and in view of the growing feeling in favour of a Commission of Inquiry, it may be well to consider in what respects the British Museum Library falls short of national requirements.

A Subject Catalogue.

The great need of the British Museum Library is a catalogue by subjects. This need is brought here to the forefront, because it was recognised as a vital need by the Museum authorities, and because there are signs that the project is being abandoned. A retrospect of the history of the catalogue is necessary fully to appreciate the situation. Until 1834 there was no suggestion of a printed catalogue, but in that year the Trustees, who asked for a report on the subject, were advised by Mr. Baber that a printed catalogue was desirable, but that it should all be completed in manuscript before a single portion was printed. In December, 1838, the Trustees accepted the scheme of a printed catalogue, but insisted on Mr. Panizzi, as he then was, starting to print while the catalogue was in progress. In 1839 Panizzi initiated his famous 91 rules of cataloguing, and on August 8 the work was started, the first and only volume of the catalogue being printed in 1841. By that time the Trustees had realised their mistake, and Panizzi was able to complete his catalogue in manuscript, as he had originally wished. In 1849 Mr. Wilson Croker and Mr. Roy hit upon the idea of movable slips, which made it possible for an unlimited number of interpolations to be made, and in 1851 a new catalogue of 150 volumes was placed in the Reading Room. To follow the history of the catalogue in detail is unnecessary, and would be wearisome. For the present purpose it is only necessary to notice that on Mr. Bond becoming librarian in 1879 the printing of the catalogue was begun. It was completed in 1900.

A Subject Catalogue Intended.

In preparing the catalogue, the authorities have always had in view the compilation of a subject catalogue. Under the prescient influence of Panizzi, the catalogue with its movable slips was made fourfold. Three copies are the same as those which stand in the Reading Room, arranged according to authors. The fourth is arranged according to the shelf mark, that is to say, roughly classified according to subject. Not only might this collection of slips, which are mounted on cards, be used as the basis of such a catalogue, but it might be used as the foundation for a classed catalogue to universal literature. Speaking on this subject to the London Conference of Librarians in 1877, Dr. Garnett said:

"The foundation of a classed index to universal literature has been laid by simply putting away titles as fast as transcribed, without the nation having hitherto incurred any cost beyond that of the pasteboard boxes. . . . I should be inclined to recommend the preparation of an abridged classified index, compiled from the fourth copy slips I have been describing, and its publication from time to time in sections generally complete in themselves and affording the best means for a gradual solution of this problem."

Quotations might be made from evidence given before Commissions and from other sources to show that this idea of a subject catalogue has been prominent for fifty years and more in the minds of librarians. It has come, therefore, as an unwelcome surprise to those who use the Library to read the following quotation in the preface of the latest volume of the admirable subject index of modern works, for which Mr. G. K. Fortescue, LL.D., the Keeper of Printed Books, is responsible. The Museum contains about 3¾ million volumes. A trifle over a quarter of a million of these are indexed according to subject in Mr. Fortescue's volumes, but, with a few exceptions, no books published before 1880 are included in the Museum's classifications. Mr. Fortescue writes:

"By using this work (*i.e.*, the Reading Room Index) in conjunction with the five volumes of the Subject Index of Modern Works the reader will be enabled to select both the standard works of earlier periods and the more recent literature of each subject. The required information, moreover, will be found within a reasonable compass, instead of being buried in the overwhelming mass of titles which, in the compiler's opinion, would render a General Class Catalogue of the entire Library rather a hindrance than a help to the student."

Abandonment of the Scheme.

The only meaning that can be placed on Mr. Fortescue's statement is that the Museum

authorities have abandoned, for the time at any rate, all idea of a subject catalogue of the books in the Library which were published before 1880. Mr. Fortescue's point will not really bear examination. The British Museum Library is not intended for the casual reader, who is unable to find his way about a library, and is not to any considerable extent used by men of that class. The purpose of the Library is to supply the needs of those who understand the technical methods of research. No matter how many the volumes to be classified, their inclusion would in no way confuse a man who knows his way about a library. By sufficient subdivision the number of volumes falling into any class would neither be overwhelming nor even inconveniently large. In opposition to Mr. Fortescue's statement, there is the commonplace that many people who are conducting research work in London actually write to Washington, make use of the subject catalogue there, and when Washington has supplied the titles and authors of the volumes required, consult the collection in the British Museum. There is no reason why the extremely valuable work that Mr. Fortescue is carrying out should not be continued in its present form. For many purposes recently-published volumes alone are useful, and, in any case, in order to keep the subject catalogue up to date, it would be necessary to print the titles of all new works and to publish them, so as to keep the volumes issued to subscribers modernised.

While the preparation of a subject catalogue is the most important point on which an inquiry should be held, it will be shown in a second article that reform is urgently required in other branches of the work of the Library, if its efficiency is to be maintained at a pitch corresponding with the importance of the collection which is there held in trust for the nation.

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THE BRITISH MUSEUM LIBRARY.

II.—REFORMS IN ADMINISTRATION

BY A CORRESPONDENT.

While a subject catalogue to the British Museum Library is, as has been pointed out, the reform most urgently required, there are a considerable number of ways well within what should be the capacity of the Museum whereby the value of its collection could be very materially increased. Of these the most important perhaps is the method by which books are acquired for the collection. As regards English books very little difficulty arises. Under the Copyright Act the Museum is entitled to a copy of all books published, and although the Act does not specify any time limit during which application must be made, the Museum authorities are very lenient in enforcing their claim when the book is a few years old. In this way a certain number of volumes are lost to the Museum. A more serious issue, however, is sometimes raised by the still open question as to what constitutes publication. Many books are published privately, and these are not asked for by the Museum. In this connection the further point arises that several books which are supposed to be published privately are, as a matter of fact, offered openly to the public. The instance may be taken of books which are open to subscription, and for which subscriptions are still received after the work is printed. It has happened that the author of such a book has presented free copies to the Museum, making the proviso, however, that they should not be seen by the public for a certain number of years. In accepting this condition the Museum admits that the books have not been published within the meaning of the Act. In the interests of the collection it might have been wiser to test the matter, and to get a ruling as to what constitutes publication.

Purchase of Books.

The purchase of foreign books is urgently in need of reform. It should not be forgotten that this includes a large number of American books. The present method is that the responsibility of purchase, in which the Keeper of Printed Books has rightly a very free hand, is delegated by him to subordinates, each of whom looks after the books published in a certain language. As might be expected, the system works badly. Important books are often not acquired and unimportant books are often purchased because the buyer is ignorant of the subjects with which he has to deal. This could, and ought to, be prevented by those who are charged to purchase for the Museum being responsible for the books on a certain subject, no matter in what language they are issued. It is easy for a man who knows his subject to ascertain the value of a book, whatever the language in which it is written. As regards the older books, the conditions of purchase are in many ways unsatisfactory. The relations between the British Museum and the second-hand booksellers are not as intimate as they should be. The authorities neither cultivate them nor read their catalogues, and even in the case of valuable books which they would like to purchase the delay that ensues is often so great that the booksellers are unable to afford the tying-up of their capital which is involved. A disadvantage of this policy is that it not infrequently results that the Museum is unable to enrich its collection as adequately as it should be able to do considering the resources at its command. A last criticism in this connection is the neglect to remedy the enormous deficiencies in the English books published before the middle of the Nineteenth Century. It is almost axiomatic that a national collection should possess a copy of every book published in the country. No exact calculations have been made of the Museum's deficiencies in English literature, but it is probable that for certain periods the deficiency is not less than 50 per cent. A great part of this could be made good at small expense if the authorities were prepared to pay a fixed minimum price for English-printed books not recorded in their catalogue, say, 9d. for pamphlets and 2s. for larger works—perfect and in fair condition.

Times of Opening.

From the standpoint of the average reader one of the most serious flaws in the administration of the Library is the early closing that is now enforced. Till recently the Reading Room was kept open from nine till eight, but during the last few years it has been closed at seven. When the change was made there was considerable complaint from many readers, but they were informed that the Trustees would not entertain the idea of returning to the old time, though they were prepared to consider a request that the Library should be kept open until ten o'clock at night. The request was made, but without the desired result. In view of the early closing of the Library and of the fact that no large libraries are open on Sunday in this country, it is impossible for any man who is engaged during the day to carry out work requiring anything approaching to elaborate refer-

ences except on Saturday afternoons. Further, during the winter months no books unless they are in the circular room are available, owing to the absence of artificial light in the store-rooms. The commonly-accepted explanation is that artificial light is disallowed on the grounds of possible danger from fire. In criticism of this it may be remarked that a portion of the store-rooms have been lighted artificially for the benefit of the assistants, and that the presence of two large gas engines under the building suggests the possibility of a far greater danger than could be incurred by a thoroughly well-protected system of illumination. It seems difficult to believe that these undoubted disadvantages could not be removed by arrangement.

Absence of a Periodical Room.

There is abundant room for criticism in connection with the periodicals and newspapers. The purchase of foreign newspapers, for instance, has become a matter of routine. Papers that were at one time influential and representative of at least a considerable section of a foreign country are still taken in, even though their standing may have changed and they may have become of no account. New papers of importance are in many cases not purchased. Thus, while the authorities subscribe to New York papers which are thoroughly competent in putting forward the non-party and the Republican points of view, the Democratic organs are ignored, and the chief literary paper of New York is not to be found in the Museum. The same criticism holds good of periodicals. In connection with periodicals the provision of a Periodical Room is a very urgent want. It seems possible that when the new buildings are completed such a room may become available. At Washington a large room is set aside for this purpose, and the latest numbers of some four thousand periodicals are exposed and can be consulted at once by any reader. The storing of provincial newspapers at Hendon is another serious disability under which the Library suffers, and it seems that the cumbrous machinery that has to be set in motion before these newspapers can be consulted might be very materially simplified.

Discomforts of the Reading Room.

In no section of the Museum is the bad effect of tradition felt so conspicuously as in the Reading Room. The new reader, who finds himself there for the first time, is utterly bewildered, and even the more experienced reader might not unfairly complain that he is left without the help that he has a right to expect. The catalogue itself is easily found, but there is little to suggest the position where the special catalogue of the books in the Reading Room is to be consulted. Works of reference such as Fortescue's Subject Index, or Poole's Index to Periodical Literature, are not easily traced by the inexperienced, nor is their attention directed to them; it is usually a considerable time before the new reader discovers where the bibliographies are placed, and there is nothing to indicate to him the bibliography that is the key to all the rest. To reorganise the Reading Room is a task that cannot lightly be undertaken, but it may be suggested that so slight a change as the supplementing of the numbers on the shelves by tablets with such titles as "Classics," "Theology," &c., would be a welcome reform. Much could be done also by publishing a small guide to the Reading Room. The lectures delivered on the use of the Library from time to time by Mr. R. A. Peddie, useful as they undoubtedly are—incidentally it may be remarked that they are not due to enterprise on the part of the British Museum—are a move in the right direction, but quite insufficient to take the place of the provision which the authorities might fairly be expected to make. An improvement, which would add to the convenience of readers by saving the time necessary to get books from the store, and obviate a considerable amount of the perambulation that at present occurs, would be the installation of a number of telewriters on the catalogue desk. Dr. Garnett put forward the suggestion several years ago, but, though a useful system of pneumatic tubes has been installed for sending readers' requests for books to the various departments of the book store, this quicker method has not been taken up. He also proposed the establishment of a photographic department in connection with the Library and the Museum generally. In place of this a charge has been made to photographers who wish to reproduce any specimens of the Museum collection. Despite the renovation of the Reading Room, the ventilation still remains inadequate. In the old days the condition of affairs was so notorious that when the cleaning took place a few years ago old readers sedulously put about reports to the effect that when the scaffolding was put up for the purposes of cleaning the ventilating fan was discovered broken; another theory proposed was that the ventilation shaft was found closed and locked, and it had been determined by inquiry that the key had been lost for forty years. The fact remains, as can be seen from the drowsiness that overtakes the readers, that the ventilation of the room leaves much to be desired.

Other instances of unsatisfactory management might be quoted. As regards the binding department, for instance, to which is allocated a very large share of the annual grant, it would be interesting to know whether the contract, which has been in the same hands for many years, is, or ever has been, put up for tender. But side by side with the criticisms that have been made, it should be remembered that the Museum administration is markedly superior to that of any of the large libraries in Europe.

Why an Inquiry is Necessary.

From what has been written, it is clear, however, that the organisation of the Museum Library is very far from perfect, and that there is a danger that, as time goes on, it will become more and more out of touch with modern progress. It has been suggested that the constitution of the Museum government is such as to render the introduction of changes difficult, and it is not improbable that it might be desirable to effect certain changes that would require the sanction of Parliament. Changes in an institution whose efficiency is as considerable as that of the British Museum, cannot, however, be undertaken without very careful consideration. The time has now come for an inquiry to be held, at least as far as the Library is concerned. The immediate justification for this course is to be found in the extract that was quoted from the preface to Mr. G. K. Fortescue's Subject Index. By advocating formally the abandonment of the idea of a general subject catalogue, to include the whole of the Museum collection, he suggests that there has been a reversal of what has generally been regarded as the policy of the Museum. In a matter of this sort each year's delay can only aggravate the situation. In view of the wealth of the collection, it is in the highest degree unsatisfactory that the Library should not be conducted according to the most modern principles of library science. If the position of affairs is to be changed a Royal Commission is necessary, and steps should be taken to secure its appointment at the earliest possible date. Such a Commission would hold an exhaustive inquiry, and it should be possible for it to make recommendations providing for the reconstruction of the administration of the Museum on an up-to-date system. It should be feasible also to secure the constitution of the Museum on a more flexible basis, and to ensure that the best possible use should be made of the new accommodation that will shortly become available. The work of the librarian has passed almost entirely from the domain of individual opinion, and there are canons of library science which can be laid down with certainty. No one would suggest that the Museum at present possesses the system most suited to its needs. The officials of the Library are handicapped by the system under which they are called upon to work, and the unquestionably generous service they give to the public has not the reward which their efforts deserve. If the facts are once brought out with all the authority that a Royal Commission confers it will be a comparatively easy matter to re-establish the work of the Museum on a thoroughly sound basis. Without it there is little hope of the much-needed reforms, of which only a few relating to but one department have been given, being carried into effect.

MORNING POST, MONDAY, JANUARY 22, 1912.

BRITISH MUSEUM LIBRARY

INTERVIEW WITH A MUNICIPAL LIBRARIAN.

Attention was drawn in two articles in the *Morning Post* last week to the condition of the British Museum Library. It was argued that the constitution of the Museum and the method of appointment of librarians was such as to make the Library administration unprogressive. The view was put forward that the abandonment of the idea of a subject index by the British Museum authorities was a most unfortunate decision. Criticism was directed against the methods by which the Library is maintained, the two chief lines of attack being that the authorities appear to have no wish to aim at a complete collection of English books, and that they purchase foreign books by language instead of by subject, with the result that foreign thought is very indifferently represented. It was suggested that a great deal more might be done for the convenience and comfort of readers, both as regards the arrangement of the reading-room and the hours during which it is open to the public. The conclusions reached were that it was essential that reforms should be introduced with extreme caution, and that a Royal Commission should be held to investigate the whole question of the administration and government of the Museum.

Mr. James Duff Brown, the Chief Librarian of the public libraries at Islington, saw a representative of the *Morning Post* on Saturday, and discussed some of the criticisms that had been made. "I have for some time past," he said, "been expecting that the administration of the British Museum Library would form the subject of public criticism, and I hope that the two articles which have been published will make the public realise that, as has long been known by librarians and expert readers, the collection is very considerably less valuable than would be the case if it were efficiently administered.

Method of Appointment.

"Your correspondent," he continued, "was, to my mind, very well advised in opening his case by considering the method of appointment to the Library staff, and in raising this point he laid his finger on the great disability under which many libraries in this country suffer. The University man who has taken his Honours B.A. has not even given presumptive evidence that he has any talent or taste for library administration. The possession of a degree need not, and in many cases does not, indicate any more than that a man has moderate intelligence and a reasonably good memory. The holder of the qualification would be the first to admit that he is ignorant of the elements of library work. He has not as yet been brought into touch with the requirements of the public. In such a library as the British Museum he is never brought directly into touch with them. Nor has he the theoretical knowledge of librarianship that is given by the diploma of the Library Association. I do not want it to be imagined that I am making an attack on the University graduate. A University training has its undoubted value to a librarian, but it ought to come second to a knowledge of librarianship. The system of the British Museum, however, makes it inevitable that scholarship should come first and librarianship second. The result of the present system, as everyone who has at all an intimate knowledge of the British Museum Library knows, is that of the men who are drafted into it some few become expert librarians with a right conception of their duty to the State and to the public, but the bulk of them regard the public use of the Library as a necessary evil. They have and develop a scholar's interest in some special topic connected with books, and devote to that topic the energy and the interest that should be devoted to the fundamental task of the librarian, to make as accessible as possible to the public the books of which he has the care. It is the old story of under-paying. The Museum underpays its men, and it attracts to itself students who are willing to put up with the inadequate salaries they receive because the amount of work demanded of them is small and they have time and opportunity to devote their energies to pursuing the private studies in which they are interested. This condition of affairs dates back to the time when Government appointments were regarded as sinecures to be awarded to those who, for some service rendered quite apart from the post, were thought to have deserved well of the State. To put the matter more bluntly, the staff of the Museum Library are open to the criticism that as a body they administer their trust in their own interests and not in those of the public. In the State libraries the fact that librarianship is not made the criterion of appointment results in the drafting of quite unsuitable men into the service, with the result that the men themselves are miserable, and that the public do not receive the attention they have a right to expect. My argument is that the candidates selected should, after passing the necessary Civil

Service examination, be obliged to take the diploma of the Library Association, which requires proficiency in Literary History, Bibliography, Classification, Cataloguing, Library History and Organisation, and Library Routine.

The Subject Catalogue.

"The absence of the subject catalogue is unquestionably the gravest defect from which the Museum suffers. In municipal libraries we have made it our business to find out by what methods the public takes volumes out of the library. Our experience has shown that the public identifies the books it wants by the subject and by the title far more often than by the name of the author. Whether this would or would not be so in the British Museum Library is a very different matter, but it points very clearly to the importance of a good subject index. Unfortunately, since the days of the logician Stanley Jevons, there has been in the Museum a prepossession in favour of an authors' catalogue and against a subject index. Until Mr. Fortescue started the compilation of his subject index for books published since 1880 there was no guide whatever of this sort to the Museum. I rather disagree with your correspondent in his estimate of the work. It is, to my mind, very far from perfect, for it is a hybrid production, not being either a pure classified catalogue with a full subject index nor an alphabetically arranged subject index with cross references and without collected entries. Under the present system it is not possible to get a general view of any subject. I have found the difficulty myself and have heard many complaints from other readers. The ideal system would be to have three catalogues—one of authors, one a classified index with full subject references, and a limited title index. In Mr. Fortescue's index the reader often has to look under several headings to find the books of which he is in search. Thus, to discover what has been published on comparative law, he will have to look up England—Law, France—Law, and so forth throughout the different countries of the world, whereas in a pure subject index he would find a small sub-class under Law devoted to the special object of his research.

Defects in the Collection.

"As your correspondent pointed out, there are very many books which ought to be in the Library, but are not to be found. Within my own experience the deficiences are chiefly in French, German, and the older local English books. The British Museum Library should, as far as possible, contain copies of every work published in the country. The obligation does not lie on the Bodleian, the Advocates', the Dublin, and the Aberystwyth libraries, but the public has a right to expect it of the Museum. The authorities, however, aim rather at making it a select library. They have no right to discriminate, for they are a Museum as well as a working library. The misfortune is that they tend to adopt museum as opposed to library methods for purposes of administration, which is wrong, and they would like to follow special library rather than museum methods in adding to the collection, which is equally wrong and even more serious, for the results of such action, so far as it obtains, is irremediable. The whole question of what books the Museum receives and how it preserves them requires looking into. I will give one specific example. I had occasion some time ago to refer to a paper written by Ballazzati on a new system for a classification, and published in an Italian Journal of Bibliography. I found the paper of which I was in search bound up with other 'tracts'; it has been cut out of the Journal in question, and I could find no trace in the Museum of what had become of the remainder of the Journal.

"Your correspondent, I think, erred on the side of clemency in his comments on the delay in getting books. It is, I must admit, impossible to hope for the rapid service one gets in Washington, for the structural conditions of the Museum render the mechanical efficiency of the Washington library unattainable. But the delays of half an hour, three-quarters of an hour, and more which occur could and ought to be prevented. The method of slips used is cumbersome. I need not go into details, but I would suggest that the requirements of the Museum could be met by making readers fill up a perforated slip on which their name and seat number appeared twice. One portion of the slip could be put on the shelf from which the book has been taken, and the remainder placed in the book and sent out at once to the reader. The present system involves the copying of each slip by an attendant—a further economy in time could be effected by increasing the number of attendants. The administration of the Library ought to be made efficient. The question of increased cost should not have to enter into it.

Restrictions on Admission.

"In addition to the points raised I should like to charge the administration with being bound by far too rigid rules. For instance, several members of my library staff, who are eighteen or nineteen years of age, wish to make use of the library, but are debarred by the age clause. While there is much to be said for the age limit of twenty years, it should not apply to working librarians. It is to the public interest that the librarians of all libraries should be encouraged to make as much use as possible of the British Museum Library, and special arrangements should be made for their accommodation. The refusal to do it is part of the general policy of restrictions on admission. This, no doubt, is partly

based on the difficulty which the Museum authorities have in finding room for their readers, but the solution should lie rather in taking steps to increase the available room than in discouraging readers.

"A further blemish on the administration is the favouritism that, as most readers will agree, unquestionably prevails. A remarkable instance of this occurred to me. I had half a dozen books on my desk and had requisitioned other volumes when, to my surprise, a note was brought saying that I could not have any more books out. My neighbour had on his desk a far larger number, and the friends to whom I have spoken about the incident are quite unable to account for it. I did not take the matter up to headquarters, and I only quote the case as an illustration of the indifference with which readers are treated. Care should be taken to prevent the very human attitude of the attendants, who give their more ready attention to those readers whom they know and like.

"Lastly, as regards fiction. For very obvious reasons works of fiction are not available until they have been published for two years, and as a consequence they do not appear in the general catalogue. I agree that the Museum Library is not the place for the novel reader, but he should be excluded, and those who for serious purposes wish to consult recent fiction should not be penalised.

"In making these criticisms of the Museum administration I should like to add, in conclusion, that it is the system against which I am directing my attacks. Those of the staff who are the victims of it and who have come to their posts quite unqualified to occupy them have my sincere sympathy, while the few who have triumphantly achieved good work in spite of their system, have my sincere admiration. I contend, however, that by reorganising the Library it could be made far more efficient, to the advantage of the public, and, indeed, to the advantage of the staff. To bring about this result I think that a Royal Commission is essential."

TO THE EDITOR OF THE MORNING POST.

SIR,—Though I am sorry to say that I am not qualified to give any opinion as to the excellence or otherwise of the Library of the British Museum in its finer points, I have found it practically impossible to make use of the Library on account of its regulations. I have no doubt this has been my fault, and that the regulations may be easily followed if one can spare the necessary time and thought.

My experience has been as follows: I wanted to consult a book, went to the Museum, ascertained the formalities and very humbly suggested to the clerk who dealt with me, that it would be a great comfort to me if I might utilise the Library then and there, that I was myself a householder and a Doctor of Medicine and a Doctor of Laws, and a Fellow of the Royal Society. No, it was impossible for me to use the Library until I had fulfilled the necessary conditions, so I went away. Being anxious to see the book, I subsequently fulfilled these formalities, whatever they may have been, and was thereafter allowed into the Library and supplied with the book I asked for, after further formalities. Having verified my reference I called the attention of the attendant to the fact that it was attributed to an incorrect date in the catalogue. I was very courteously requested to communicate with a superior official, which I did, stating that the date 1802 was erroneously catalogued in place of 1811. I received a brief answer from the high official informing me that mistakes were not made at the British Museum, and I returned to my ordinary occupations.

Some months later a friend was showing me over the Boston Free Library, and asked me to test the rate of delivery of any given book, so I named my British Museum book, and received it within five minutes. (N.B.—It was properly dated 1811 in the Boston catalogue.)

In the following year, happening to be again in Boston with a friend who wished to verify a quotation, I walked into the Library to the catalogue room, thence to a given shelf in a ready reference room, where I found the book and the quotation, and though I did not know the ropes I do not think the whole operation lasted more than a quarter of an hour. But the institution where I was able to do this is in touch with its citizens, and bears the following inscription over its door: "The Commonwealth requires the Education of its People as the Safeguard of Order and Liberty."

I am at this moment anxious to verify a reference. I cannot afford the time to do so through the machinery of the British Museum. I forget what the formalities are, but three months ago, having ascertained and fulfilled them, I received a permit allowing me to use the reading room for fifteen days, but my engagements unfortunately prevented me from using it during that period, and I am a busy man.—Yours, &c.

AUGUSTUS D. WALLER,
Jan. 20. MD., LL.D., F.R.S.

P.S.—The error of date mentioned above is now corrected by hand in the catalogue of the British Museum.

MORNING POST, TUESDAY, JANUARY 23, 1912.

BRITISH MUSEUM LIBRARY.

MR. SIDNEY LEE'S CRITICISMS.

Attention was drawn by a correspondent of the *Morning Post* last week to a number of reforms that he considered desirable in the administration of the British Museum Library. He referred particularly to the constitution of the Museum, to the mode of appointment of librarians, the need of a subject catalogue, the mode of purchase of old English and foreign books, the short hours during which the Library is available, and the preventible discomforts of the Reading Room. Mr. Sidney Lee, the editor of the Dictionary of National Biography, discussed the subject with a representative of this paper yesterday. "I have not had time," he said, "to devote much thought to the points raised by your correspondent, and we have here so much for which to be grateful to the Museum authorities that I speak only to aid any reasonable reform. I think it a favourable moment to discuss the question, because Dr. Kenyon, a man of the highest distinction, has recently become Director and commands universal confidence. He can well be relied upon to place the Library in a thoroughly efficient condition. As far as I can see, most of the required changes are of a purely administrative kind, and I believe that the Trustees, working with Dr. Kenyon, could give effect to all that is needful without any measure so strong as a Royal Commission.

"It certainly does look to me," Mr. Lee continued, "as though certain regulations of rather ancient date have been allowed to stand overlong without revision. What strikes me very much is the desirability of extending the time during which books can be procured during the winter months. The regulations as regards the use of artificial light are, as your correspondent says, quite antiquated. There is artificial light pretty well all over the Museum, and I doubt very much its exclusion from the book stores could be justified in modern conditions. Not only are readers prevented from ordering books outside the galleries of the Reading Room during the winter months, but on foggy days the ticket is sometimes brought back with the words "too dark." I should think it would be easy to devise means to meet the difficulties of the case without there being any real risk to the collection from fire. As to whether the Reading Room should be open till ten, it is a matter as to how much the public want it. When it was kept open until eight the members who used it were too few to justify the expense. There is not much evidence, however, available on the point."

NEWSPAPERS AT HENDON.

"Years ago I very strongly opposed the removal of the provincial newspapers to Hendon, and succeeded in staving it off for a time. If they are to be kept at all means should be devised to make them as accessible as possible. I think the present arrangement quite fails to make them as accessible as is desirable for the occasional consultation to which they are submitted. During the compilation of recent periods of the Dictionary of National Biography it has been very necessary frequently to consult the provincial papers, and I think a National Library should make provision for work of that kind. The present method, I understand, is that a cart on a certain day in the week (Wednesday, I believe) brings from the depository at Hendon any provincial newspapers that have been asked for since the previous Wednesday. Therefore six days may possibly elapse between your giving notice of your requirement and obtaining access to the newspaper. Such an arrangement seems to me very clumsy and cumbrous. I regard the provision of a periodical room as a very desirable reform, and I should like it to include the transactions of scientific societies and all the publications now classified under the very large and swollen heading of Academies."

FOREIGN BOOKS.

"There might, I think, be some better method of adding foreign books to the Library. I imagine it would be well to subdivide the subjects among a larger number of assistants who are linguists. In some researches I have made in early French literature and even in mediæval classical literature I have often been unable to find in the Library foreign monographs of reputed importance. It is rather a difficult topic owing to the immense number of foreign publications and the immense special knowledge required to deal with the whole output of the foreign press. I admit that outside committees of experts might even be necessary to treat foreign publications exhaustively. I think the arrangements for the acquisition of foreign books are rather better than they were a few years ago, and there is greater readiness to take external advice, which I feel sure would always be put most willingly at the disposal of the Museum authorities. There are several gaps in old foreign literature to be filled. But any scheme requires no doubt a good deal of thought before it could be made to work."

The Subject Catalogue.

"The subject catalogue is a very huge undertaking, and I should not like to commit myself hastily to any positive opinion as to its practicability. Of its usefulness, were it practicable, there can be no doubt. It would enormously facilitate research and economise effort. I was on the committee which first considered in a general way the subject index of the London Library, which was carried out with wonderful rapidity and skill by the librarian, Dr. Hagberg Wright. Dr. Wright produced in four years with an organised staff a most serviceable subject index of more than 250,000 volumes. The British Museum Library contains nearly sixteen times as many volumes. It would, therefore, take to complete it, if the same method were applied, sixty-four years. Probably a subject index of the British Museum would, as Dr. Wright says in the preface to his subject index, have to be undertaken in sections. Mr. Fortescue's volumes are invaluable as far as they go, but I think it unfortunate that the Trustees should commit themselves to a declaration that his work should never go backward. To make 1880 the starting point for the subject index of a National Library can hardly be justified. With an adequate staff and organisation I should think it would be possible to deal with earlier periods by degrees as well as with the present and future periods."

TO THE EDITOR OF THE MORNING POST.

Sir,—I am very glad indeed that the question of a Subject Catalogue of the Library of the British Museum has been raised in your columns, and, with your permission, will add a few points to those already given in the article which has appeared.

The problem which is placed before the research student in the Reading Room of the British Museum is divided into two parts. He has first to ascertain what books have been written on his subject, and, secondly, to discover whether the Museum possesses such books. In order to find out the titles of books, he first has to search for a bibliography of the subject. This necessitates reference to a bibliography of bibliographies, such as Courtney's "Register of National Bibliography." If no bibliography can be discovered—and there are many subjects which even at this late date are without such guides to their literature—the student must consult the national or trade bibliographies of each country, which generally possess (at any rate, in the recent volumes) an index of subjects. Having accumulated laboriously a list of books, the list must then be compared with the General Catalogue of the British Museum, and the student will have made the first step towards his goal. But what happens in the case of a subject for which no bibliography exists, or for which the bibliographies are so poor as to be almost useless? Let me give a concrete instance. A student is working at the question of the development of mines in France during the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries. If it is true (as I believe it to be) that the most recent bibliography of that subject was issued early in the Eighteenth Century, and, further, that the general bibliographies of French books for those periods, Georgi and Querard, have no subject indexes, what is the reader to do, except to work back from book to book and from reference to reference, a task which is laborious in the extreme? Again, what subject indexes are there to German books published before 1750 and between 1832 and 1870? None that I am aware of. To Italian books there is no subject index before 1835, except Haym's "Biblioteca Italiana," which only professes to deal with the rarer works. Similar remarks could be made as to the literature of many other countries, including Great Britain and the United States.

If a Subject Catalogue of the Library were in existence the student would be saved the whole of this difficult digging into bibliographies. Then the subject catalogue would tell him whether there was a bibliography of his subject, and he could proceed to collect the titles of the books not in the Library, and discover, by the aid of that invaluable work of Mr. R. A. Rye, the librarian of the University of London, "The Libraries of London," in which special library in London he would be likely to find more material. But the authorities at the British Museum insist that the research student must have a knowledge of bibliographical works before he is allowed to find out what they possess on any particular subject. It would be interesting to know how many books remain hidden and untouched on the shelves of the British Museum from year to year, simply for the reason that they do not occur in any bibliography, and the student is absolutely ignorant of their existence.

The whole of the preceding part of this letter relates, of course, to the period before 1880, the date when Mr. Fortescue's admirable indexes begin. Since that date there is little trouble in finding the titles of books that have been acquired by the Museum. But I should like to combat very strongly the idea that any large proportion of the serious students in the Reading Room are satisfied with the indexes to modern books and do not desire to know what the Museum possesses before 1880. I know many readers, and from inquiries I have made I learn that they are all in favour of a Subject Catalogue; they all consider that they have been considerably hampered in their work by the absence of such catalogue, and they all scorn the suggestion that they are likely to be hindered by the "overwhelming mass of titles."

May I, in conclusion, draw your readers' attention to two catalogues, which, in my opinion, support the case for a Subject Catalogue and prove that the only two reasons that can be urged against such a proposal are, first, want of money, and, secondly, insufficient staff,

which two reasons are really one and the same? The first catalogue is that of the Surgeon-General's Library at Washington. This library contains the largest collection of medical books in the world, and the printed catalogue contains author and subject catalogues and an index to every article in every periodical in the library. The other catalogue I should like to refer to is the catalogue of books on the history of France in the Bibliothèque Nationale. This magnificent work, contained in twenty quarto volumes, with indexes of authors and anonymous works, is worthy of publication by any National Library. These two catalogues appear to me to answer any objections that may be urged on the score of multiplication of titles on any one subject. In the case of the medical library this trouble is met by making the headings as specific as possible, and the only criticism that might be made is that the titles under each subject might have been placed in chronological, rather than in alphabetical, order. This chronological arrangement is used in the French catalogue, together with a very elaborate, but perfectly easy, system of classification, which makes the "overwhelming mass of titles" less perceptible to the student.

It only remains for me to hope that the suggestions in your Correspondent's article may be carried into effect. He has shown that Dr. Garnett considered the proposal practicable, and pointed out methods for its carrying out. I believe that in the interests of British scholarship, and in the interests of research generally, it is the bounden duty of the Trustees to approach the Treasury with such a case for a Subject Catalogue as will induce them to make a special annual grant of such an amount as will lead to the work being finished within the next few years.—Yours, &c.,

R. A. PEDDIE.

St. Bride Foundation, Bride-lane, Jan. 22.

TO THE EDITOR OF THE MORNING POST.

SIR,—The two valuable articles in your paper on the British Museum Reading Room have raised questions which many readers, like myself, have long wished to see discussed. I have used the Library now for several years, and can personally bear witness to the very great courtesy and readiness to help the student and worker which is always shown by the staff. At the same time I cannot but feel that the strictures passed in these articles are well founded, and that probably nothing short of a small Royal Commission will avail to bring about the many improvements which could be, and some day will have to be, brought about.

The question of the periodicals is certainly important. At the present time practically no periodical can be seen less than six months after publication, and in general this period is much longer. Again, there seems to be little method used in securing that the sets shall be kept complete. Often one is told that the agent or publisher has not sent some review or other for a long time past, though there is no reason for the omission, which is not found out till a reader needs a later number. The suggestion for a Periodical Room is certainly justified.

As to the opening of the Library till a later hour, your Correspondent has rather under-estimated his case. On ordinary days a general kind of shuffling unrest begins about 6.30, which culminates about 6.45 in what is practically a demand to give up one's books. It is understood that the hour for closing was altered from eight to seven o'clock, because of the small attendance; but this very hour is just that in which a great number of people will be having their evening meal. The small attendance in this hour is no index to the numbers who would use the room from eight to ten. The principle underlying the hours of opening surely is that a valuable collection (or plant, to put it commercially) like this should be worked to its utmost capacity.

That in the winter months readers should be cut off from practically the whole Library at 3.30 is an utter absurdity if it is to be justified on the plea that hand-lamps would be dangerous. The real reason for this and the earlier closing, of course, is the question of expenditure. It is rather childish to put forward pretexts rather than honest statements. On Saturday, moreover, the only day on which many can use the Library, the book supply is cut off a quarter of an hour earlier.

Finally, I might suggest that a better method of lighting could be devised for the Reading Room; the present system is destructive of the eyesight, and a sore trial.—Yours, &c., NIKTO.

Jan. 22.

ORNING POST, WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 24, 1912.

BRITISH MUSEUM LIBRARY.

VOLUNTEER ASSISTANCE PROPOSED.

In connection with the criticisms made on the administration of the British Museum Library last week in the *Morning Post*, when it was suggested, among other points, that a subject catalogue should, as originally intended, be prepared, Mr. Victor G. Plarr, the Librarian of the Royal College of Surgeons, proposes that several of the members of the Learned Societies should be invited to volunteer their services. Commenting generally on the criticisms in the articles Mr. Plarr said: "I feel loth to appear in any way to criticise the work of the Museum authorities. The difficulties of administering a Library of the size and importance of that attached to the Museum can hardly be realised except by a responsible member of the staff. I recognise the delicacy of my position in attempting to comment on the articles which have appeared in the *Morning Post*, but I think it only fair to your correspondent to say that I am glad that he has drawn attention to Mr. Fortescue's latest statement. I should understand better the attitude of the authorities if they said that the work was too great for the staff, or if they feared a difficulty of accommodating the volumes when completed, but I cannot agree with the view that such an index would be rather a hindrance than a help to the student. What seems to me necessary is to make the index full and elaborate with proper cross references. I feel on surer ground when I state that such an index has often proved invaluable in suggesting points in research work. Take such a subject, for instance, as Mendelism. Is it likely that Mendel's work would have been lost sight of for so many years if it had been in a large library and indexed under such a sub-divided heading as 'Heredity—Experimental'—'Plants—Peas.' To give an illustration out of the College of Surgeons' Library where we are just completing a full subject index; one of our entries reads 'Skulls—Tasmanian,' and, of course, is cross referenced to Tasmania. An anthropologist who consults our library, gets all he wants about skulls under the heading 'Skulls' and can find out at once whether we have any information on such particular points as the skull of the Tasmanians. Without a subject index he can only ask the Library whether it has a book by this or that author. He cannot put the question: 'What is there on this subject?' Further, while the librarian in charge may be able to help him in this connection, it can only be to a very limited extent; for the librarian himself can only have an imperfect knowledge of the books which his library contains.

"The usefulness of the work, so far, at any rate, as Medicine is concerned, is, I think, demonstrated by our own experience of the value of the Surgeon-General's (Washington) catalogue of medical works. Though it is the catalogue of another library we use it here for reference; it contains the titles of several volumes and articles that are not in the British Museum Library, and yet the authorities appear to indicate that they recognise its value as an aid to research by having it kept in the catalogue desk. A similar index to the Museum collection of medical books would surely be of even greater value to users of the Museum Library in their own subject. As regards technical subjects I should like to see the principle accepted that the Museum should be as much up to date as the expert librarie."

A System of Voluntary Assistants.

"Speaking generally and without taking into account the special problems and difficulties with which the Museum has to contend, I cannot but regard the compilation of a detailed subject index as a work of first-rate importance. It is pitiful to see the amount of wasted effort that goes on. People write books that have already been written very much better than they are capable of doing it, and a lot of this wasted effort could be saved by a good subject index. The fact is that scholars are ignorant of what has already been done. I should like to suggest that the British Museum authorities might possibly find it advisable to enlist the assistance of volunteer workers. Such societies as the Bacon Society or the Early English Texts Society—to mention only two of several—have members who would, I feel sure, be willing to co-operate and give their services in such a cause. There are many scholars, too—undisciplined scholars for the most part—at present engaged in wild goose chases whose energies and abilities might be diverted into profitable channels. A point to remember is that it is unnecesary to aim at perfection. Mistakes are not, in such a work, of supreme importance, for by its very character a subject catalogue remains flexible, and would be amended and corrected as a result of the suggestions that came from those who made use of it."

[The interview that appeared in the *Morning Post* yesterday was, of course, with Sir Sidney Lee.]

TO THE EDITOR OF THE MOR

SIR,—The British Museum has a fuller collection of books printed in its own country and a richer store of important works printed abroad than any other large library in which I have worked in England or abroad; and persons who read there get the books which they order with the most praiseworthy quickness. No doubt it has its faults. But those selected by your critic seem to me in part unreal, and in part less serious than he suggests.

I do not know how many of the library officials are University graduates. Many of them obviously are not. But I do know something of the Municipal Libraries and Museums in England, and I am quite sure that some of them would gain very greatly if their chief officials were, I will not say graduates, but men with the education and ability which is implied in a fairly good University degree. I have little doubt that what is true of these libraries is also in its way true of the British Museum. The technique of classification and other special library work can be learned by an educated and reasonably able man of the kind I have indicated. To many persons with other qualifications it is apt to be a fetish.

I wholly disbelieve in the proposed subject catalogue. It is not the duty of libraries to make such catalogues. Very few librarians, whether graduates or not, have the necessary knowledge. Subject catalogues should be made (as they often are made) by specialists in particular branches of knowledge. It is only such men who can go behind the titles of books and articles and select appropriate items which their authors may have mislabelled, and who can distinguish the good from the worthless. Men who have been trained merely to the technique of classification are, so far as I have been able to observe, generally slaves to the titles of books, and the subject catalogues in libraries which I have had the misfortune to look at have nearly always wasted my time. Of course, in a comparatively small library it is most useful for the librarian to have some rough list by which he can satisfy inquirers (who are not, as a rule, students, though they may be readers) when they ask what there is on Japan or German history or Italian embroidery. But that is quite a different thing from a subject catalogue to a huge library. The way to make the ocean of books in the British Museum useful to students is to encourage really competent specialists to make real subject catalogues of the principal branches of work and research.

The other points mentioned in the articles seem to be matters of smaller detail—the hours of opening, the method of arranging periodicals, the use of guide posts to those who are lost in the Reading Room. These no doubt need consideration, and I suspect they receive it from the library authorities without any need for a formal or special inquiry.—Yours, &c.,

F. HAVERFIELD.

Oxford, Jan. 23.

TO THE EDITOR OF THE MORNING POST.

SIR,—The ideal library should be in a position to state what works it possesses on a given subject with the same certainty with which it can reply to questions as to their possession or not of a book of given authorship. It is now generally agreed that a subject catalogue, though of the highest intrinsic value, presupposes, as a condition of its full utility, a reliable author catalogue; and not so very many years have passed since the printing of the author catalogue of the British Museum Library was [illegible] a subject catalogue is largely [illegible] author catalogue, it must nevertheless be admitted that an author catalogue [illegible] sufficient. The recognition of the want, however, imposes an additional strain upon the resources of the British Museum Library staff which they cannot reasonably be expected to encounter at present. Without a large addition to the existing staff and without a special grant of a considerable amount for the purpose, it is out of the question for the British Museum authorities to undertake the colossal task of compiling a subject catalogue embracing the whole of the British Museum Library, which is estimated to contain from four to five million volumes. The limited resources of the Museum have probably been fully taxed in the production of Mr. Fortescue's admirable subject index of modern works. To expect more in the present circumstances seems to me unreasonable.

For the present this undoubted need of a subject catalogue is in a large measure met by the existing bibliographies, which should be well known to those who understand the technical methods of research, and it is for this class of reader, as your correspondent recognises, that the British Museum Library caters. Several of these bibliographies are available in open shelves in the Reading Room, and in conjunction with the author catalogue act as a guide to the student who wants to know what works the British Museum possesses on a given subject.

I am not in agreement with your correspondent's criticism on the convenience of the arrangement of the Reading Room, though, like him, I think it would be an advantage to students if it could be open during longer hours. The matters of internal administration criticised by the articles can, I am sure, be satisfactorily defended by the authorities of the British Museum.—Yours, &c.,

REGINALD A. RYE,
Goldsmiths' Librarian, Univ. Lond.

South Kensington, Jan. 23.

TO THE EDITOR OF THE MORNING POST.

SIR,—As I have during the last few years regularly made use of the British Museum Library, may I add some remarks to those provoked by the articles published last week? The letter of Dr. Waller in your issue of yesterday is a little puzzling to anyone conversant with

the regulations of the Library. If he, not being blessed with a ticket of admission, desired to consult a book without delay, why did he not apply for a one day's permit? A friend of mine, an American graduate, told me she was a little amused by the solemnity which hedges this concession; but the main and the indubitable point is that she got it, and so would Dr. Waller. Thereafter he could have applied for a reader's ticket, and this to an M.D. and an F.R.S. would have doubtless been sent in due course; and he could have used the Library at his own convenient time and pleasure. What more could the Museum authorities do?

The point touched by the gentleman interviewed by your representative, namely, that some books which the Museum should have are not to be found there, is interesting; but it seems to me he places the responsibility on the wrong shoulders. I have thought occasionally that there ought to be some machinery for ensuring that publishers are made acquainted with and fulfil their obligations to the Museum. It no doubt often happens that the small publishers of country towns do not know they should send up copies of their publications; the London publishers are not without sin in this matter, as I have found with regard to books of various dates; and the Museum authorities, I suppose, consider they would require a much-augmented staff if dunning applications to these misguided men are to be made completely and throughout the Kingdom. Again, a complete subject-index, to which Mr. Brown also refers, is, I think, to be desired, though the existing one (that of Dr. Fortescue, of publications 1880-1910) is excellent and sufficient for most purposes. And I think no reader of experience would consider any form of catalogue can compare with an author-catalogue in value for serious work. The complete works, editions, translations, and criticisms of a writer, and the full description of each book, title, date, place of printing, and printer, make the existing British Museum catalogue an invaluable work of reference which a subject-index supplements in quite secondary fashion. Besides, what are bibliographies intended for?

In fact I believe that the majority of readers who use the British Museum, and who therefore constitute the great public for which Mr. Brown is so needlessly concerned, will fundamentally disagree with his assertions, particularly with that most unwarrantable one that the staff of the Museum Library "administer their trust in their own interests and not in that of the public." The Library is one of the finest collections of books in the world for the use of the real student, whoever and whatever he may be, and to the end of time that individual is going to prefer scholarship to characterise the officials of such a library, and to rate this qualification far above mere librarianship. The reader there needs occasionally the guidance of experts, and knows he can obtain it; he does not need the latest fad in book-classification or library administration, belauded to-day and condemned to-morrow. I have never heard of an instance in which that guidance was not courteously placed at the service of the inquirer; and in fact I should have expected the detractor to describe the attitude of the Library as grandmotherly rather than step-motherish towards the public. When the authorities provide free lectures for all who choose to attend them, upon the use of the Library, particularly of the reference collections to be found immediately accessible in the Reading Room; and when points of difficulty can be brought without delay before officials there, the public, it seems to me, finds itself quite adequately assisted already. I can think of several institutions, Government Departments included, pitiably in need of Royal Commissions. Until their more serious cases receive attention, let complaints against the British Museum Library be "filed for reference."—Yours, &c.,

EDITH S. HOOPER, M.A. (Edin.),
sometime Fellow of Bryn Mawr College, U.S.A.
Chenies-street Chambers, Jan. 23.

TO THE EDITOR OF THE MORNING POST.

SIR,—As one who has often been a receiver of benefits from the Library of the British Museum, may I be allowed to refresh Dr. Waller's memory as to the formalities required before admittance to the General Reading Room? Anyone who wishes to use it has merely to apply in writing to the Director of the Museum for a reader's ticket, and, as a guarantee of the applicant's respectability, the signature and address of a householder have to be added to the applicant's own signature. The ticket then supplied holds good for a term of six months. If required at any subsequent date it has only to be forwarded for renewal to the Director, and in my case has always been returned by the next post, so that the lapse of time has been of the shortest. On one occasion, having mislaid my ticket, I found myself, like Dr. Waller, without the necessary talisman for the Reading Room. I consequently asked to be directed to the office where readers' tickets are issued. There the official in charge at once supplied me with a fresh ticket, without my finding it necessary to mention any of my qualifications and without my having wasted more than about five minutes. If these formalities are difficult, what is there in life that anyone can find easy? Genuine shortcomings in the Library will not be improved by the complication of needed reforms in the personal methods of readers.—Yours, &c.,

Jan. 23. E. DOUGLAS HUME.

TO THE EDITOR OF THE MORNING POST.

SIR,—Two plain defects in the working of the British Museum Library are apparent after a perusal of your articles on the subject: (1) the paucity of officials and (2) the need—the pressing need—of a subject index.

To the first is to be attributed in great part the intolerable delay in procuring books to which readers are subjected. It is a familiar fact for users of the Reading Room to find that after having filled up the official docket for the needed work and placing it in

one of the baskets provided for the purpose that it lies there without passing through the gates of officialdom for a period of from five to twenty minutes. I have timed it and know. The period that elapses before the volume actually reaches you is from half an hour to an hour and a half, by which time one's feeling of apathy is slightly stimulated by a sense of wonder that the book has not reached you carefully tied in red tape with the seal of the Museum Trustees attached. Whatever the defects in the inner working of the Library, it is obvious that an increase in the number of assistants must materially improve these conditions, and let it not be thought that I am making any attack on those who are now in charge of the Reading Room, for a more painstaking, courteous, and obliging set of officials it has never been my lot to meet.

As regards a subject index, all students are aware that the London Library issued a couple of years ago such an index to their library, and in compiling it Dr. Hagberg Wright produced a work which must prove a pattern and example to all indexers for some time to come. This monumental work took about four years to complete, cost a little over £4,000, and required the services of only four expert workers and four non-experts (two typists, a boy clerk, and a porter). In proportion to the result it cannot be gainsaid that the cost was small, the time occupied was short, and the staff was modest; and when the special difficulty of dealing with the books in this library, viz., the many thousands of books continually in the homes of its readers, is further taken account of, it seems absurd to suggest that operations on a larger scale would not be the means of producing a similar index for the British Museum, although I know in saying this I have authority against me, including that of Dr. Hagberg Wright himself.—Yours, &c.,

Jan. 23. A. T. B.

BRITISH MUSEUM LIBRARY.

SPECIAL RESEARCH DIFFICULTIES.

The criticisms of the administration of the British Museum Library made last week by a correspondent in the *Morning Post* were considered yesterday by Dr. B. D. Jackson, the general secretary of the Linnean Society. After explaining that the comments he felt disposed to make referred to the system pursued at the Museum, and were in no way concerned with the personal members of the staff, whom he, like other readers, had invariably found able and ready to render assistance, he said:

"I can only attempt to comment on the administration of the Library, which I use solely for purposes of consultation, from my own standpoint. There are two points in particular in which I think the administration might be improved. The delay in getting books from the stores, in my own experience, amounts on an average to about three-quarters of an hour. As I never can spend more than about one or two hours continuously at the Museum, I find that I can only make use of the slips which I can hand in during the first half hour. The others I hold over until the next day, with the result that my work may be spread over two days instead of being completed in one. Again, I cannot help thinking that the Library should be perfect in its collection of British works from 1850 onwards. Before that date it is well known that there are terrible gaps. But, by the Copyright Act in 1847, the British Museum became entitled to a copy of the best edition of all works published in this country. As regards other libraries to which a similar privilege was granted, they are only entitled to a copy of that edition of which the greatest number of copies are published. What I find most reason to complain of in this connection is that the collection of the serial work published by the societies is incomplete. For our own part, we are very careful to supply copies of our publications as they are issued to the British Museum, but I have the impression that the authorities do not keep a sufficiently close watch on this department of the collection. In connection with my work on the International Catalogue of Scientific Literature, I have often discovered that the sets are imperfect, and found that nothing has been received for so long a period as ten years. There is a penalty of £10 for an omission to supply the Museum with a copy of a published work, and I think that the authorities should be rather sharper in enforcing their privileges. The explanation may be that several societies are served by honorary secretaries who are rather difficult to get at. But, as I frequently have to make application privately for these papers, and as the British Museum is entitled to a copy of everything published, one looks to them for as perfect a set as possible, and to some extent I feel aggrieved."

The Subject Catalogue.

"As regards the articles contributed by your correspondent I feel that they are quite warranted and justifiable as an expression of opinion that some modifications are wanted. To raise a few other points, I dislike the confusion of I and J and U and V. This began with the days of Panizzi, who, as an Italian, did not value the distinction between the letters. The subject catalogue drawn up by Mr. Fortescue is not perfect, and it was not drawn up by experts. A subject catalogue would be a very great help, being a work of the same order that we are doing in the International Catalogue. If I want to go outside my own particular subject I at once turn to the second part of the Reading Room Catalogue, and, therefore, I think that to the man who has to go outside his special subject, such a work would be of the greatest value. In my society I am constantly getting inquiries for books or articles on special subjects. I cannot carry all of them in my mind. In a subject catalogue they would all come together, and an inquirer could pick out for himself what seemed most likely to answer his needs. I am of opinion that the more the machinery at the disposal of the inquirer the better. Moreover, there would be less need of making inquiries of the Reading Room staff."

TO THE EDITOR OF THE MORNING POST.

Sir,—Certainly, every library of whatever nature or standing should have a complete catalogue or index of subjects as well as an author catalogue. Whether the person using the library is an elementary student or an expert in his subject, the first thing he wants to know is what books are available on that subject. The initial difficulty with the elementary student, or any serious reader with only a limited acquaintance with books, is to know what has been written on the subject. Even if he knows who are the chief authorities it does not follow that he knows the literature, and frequently the books suitable to his particular

needs are not written by the leading authorities. Unless a classified catalogue is available such a reader is completely at a loss for guidance, and a good deal of his work will be time wasted. The Library Associations, both British and American, have for the last two decades been striving to produce classified guides to the best books for the benefit of all types of reader, from the elementary student to the expert, and Mr. Swan Sonnenschein, with his invaluable "Best Books," and Messrs. Nelson and Sons, with their "Standard Books," have done excellent service in this direction.

The case of scholars and other people engaged in research whom the writer of your articles on the British Museum has in mind, is essentially the same, but the difficulties are more formidable. Before such a person can make any use whatever of one of the larger libraries he must undertake a course in bibliographical research to find out what literature exists on his particular line of study; then follows a course of investigation into the alphabetical catalogue of authors to discover to what extent this literature is represented in the particular library. It is no uncommon thing for even an expert to find, after he has sifted all the bibliographies and other works of reference available, that he has overlooked some obscure book of vital importance, simply because there was no catalogue existing of all the books on his subject.

Besides the suggestions of your correspondent, I think the British Museum might very well undertake the formation of a union catalogue of all the research libraries in London, and even the more important provincial libraries. Anyone acquainted with Mr. R. A. Rye's "Guide to the Libraries of London" can see what an enormous number of libraries exist in London alone which are practically useless, because their catalogues are not available to the general public. In the future perhaps our public libraries at least will be co-ordinated into some centralised system to prevent waste and overlapping, and promote general efficiency, but at present such a union catalogue as I suggest would be an inestimable boon.—Yours, &c.,

ERNEST A. BAKER.

Woolwich Public Library, Jan. 24.

TO THE EDITOR OF THE MORNING POST.

SIR,—I think it will be obvious to the general mind that any library worthy of the name should be in a position to say what it possesses on a given subject with even greater certainty than it can intimate what works it possesses by a particular author. Of course there are in existence a few individuals who read only authors and not topics, but they are very few in number. At least 90 per cent. of the inquiries a librarian receives (and I speak from 25 years' experience in the profession) are: "What have you got relating to such-and-such a subject?" It does not matter to the seeker after information whom the author is, so long as it is someone who understands the subject. Some of the inquiries I had here yesterday, for instance, were for information on "Labour Exchanges," "Friendly Societies," "Panama Canal," and "Local Government." No authors were mentioned, nor were any known probably; certainly not considered.

On the other hand, there are institutions with very large libraries which cater particularly for the wants of their students, who are usually given specified text-books to read, and in such cases, where authors are known, it is quicker to refer direct to them. But even if inquiries are generally for a subject rather than an author, it is possible to meet the wishes of both sides if the books are closely classified and arranged in their logical relationship. Every up-to-date library has its books located according to some definite scheme of classification, to which there is an alphabetical index, and the inquirer for a subject finds all the books on that topic, and others closely related, shelved together. In such instances an author catalogue will probably suffice, at any rate to a degree. But you cannot classify in the shelves articles in periodicals and composite works, and as these are often the only up-to-date literature on given subjects it is urgently necessary that the information in these should be made readily accessible. I am of the opinion that the form of catalogue most useful and to which the least objection is to be found is the classified catalogue, to which an alphabetical author index is appended. In this way all articles, wherever printed, can be definitely placed in their proper subjects, and the author index will refer to all the subjects (which usually have a distinct number) which contain contributions by him. However it is treated, there can be no question that it is the subject which must be predominant and not the author.

With reference to the articles in the British Museum, there is a good deal of truth in what is said, particularly with reference to staff appointments. It seems to be quite true that it is the scholar who gets the preference rather than the walking encyclopædia and the efficient organiser. One must recognise, however, that the institution is so vast that it must be a difficult matter to introduce wholesale alterations in the systems in vogue. Especially would this be difficult in regard to the subject catalogue. When a Library contains nearly 4,000,000 documents it must be obvious it would be an appalling task for anyone to undertake to compile a systematic subject catalogue. Dr. Fortescue's index may not be perfect (I personally object to such headings as "Capital and Labour"), but it is an exceedingly useful and wonderful work, and its issue was a sign that innovations are attempted sometimes when possible. The

British Museum appears to me to be quite on a different footing from other Libraries. I should feel inclined to suggest that the majority of readers there know which particular works they want, simply because application is so often made to other Libraries, where, from bibliographies and by other means, actual works are denoted.

I have often wondered if the British Museum authorities have any arrangement with foreign countries, by which they can regularly be informed of all books which the specialists of a particular country deem to be indispensable. Surely such an arrangement is possible, and it would certainly save a good deal of time and trouble on this side. There is no doubt a number of American books which are not in the Museum, but which ought to be. Only a short time ago I was able to supply a prominent economist with seven volumes, out of eight asked for, on railway matters, and which, I was informed, he was not able to obtain at the British Museum. One of these (the Elkins Commission on Railway Rates) is, I believe, the most important contribution to the literature of the subject issued for many years.

Is it not a fact also that, even for British books, the "English Catalogue" is the sole guide of the Museum authorities, and this, of course, while admirable, so far as it goes, does not contain anything like all the books published in the United Kingdom, especially provincial works. Why cannot the law be altered so that copyright will only be granted for a book when a copy has been duly deposited in the Library of the British Museum? Has the Museum ever enforced its penalty for non-compliance with the Copyright Act so far as it affects the delivery of copies of books there?—Yours, &c., B. M. HEADICAR,

Librarian.

London School of Economics,
Clare Market, Jan. 24.

TO THE EDITOR OF THE MORNING POST.

SIR,—Great as must be the admiration of those who use or have had occasion to use the Library of the British Museum for that magnificent collection, and sincere as may be their gratitude for the unfailing courtesy of the officials, they may nevertheless feel that some of the matters to which your correspondent draws attention, and some others beside, are such as do call for serious consideration. Readers who have had long experience of the Reading Room —I have been a reader, regular or occasional, for over twenty-five years—may well feel that something of that "speeding up" which is supposed to be a characteristic of the time is really called for in the Library. Where all the shelves and all the books are numbered, even in so vast a collection, it should be possible for a reader to obtain a required work at his desk within say a quarter of an hour after placing his requisition slip in the basket. How often has an hour or more to be spent in idle waiting. The delay may be sometimes caused by slowness in clearing the baskets, in collecting the books, or in delivering them from the central desk. Whether it results from there being an inadequate number of attendants or not I cannot as a mere reader judge, but I do know—from my own experience and from the complaints I have listened to from other readers less afflicted with patience—that such delay is by no means infrequent. To readers who use the room constantly for research work such delay is less serious than to those who use it occasionally for special reference to works not otherwise easily accessible. This may seem a small matter, but it is one that deserves consideration if the efficiency of the British Museum Library service is to be, as it should be, the best obtainable.

Another matter which may seem of small moment to some readers is of very serious import to others, and that is the closing of the Library nominally at seven o'clock, but actually, so far as any work that readers can do, some time earlier. An insistent bell warns readers to cease work long before seven, and those who delay until anywhere near the hour before giving up the books are liable to receive a gentle but unjustifiable hint from an attendant. If the Library is open until a given hour, whatever that hour may be, it should be open for use as a library until then. Some years ago, when I was engaged in daily office work and had but an hour or so each evening during which I could get on with the work I wished at the British Museum, this custom robbed me of comparatively much of my short time, and there are doubtless many readers who suffer now in the same way. One may drink on licensed premises right up to the actual "closing time," why not at the fount of learning? To be properly serviceable the Library should be open until ten, or at least, as of old, until eight o'clock, and readers should be allowed to work until that closing time. These, as I have said, may be small matters, but in the efficiency of a great institution the small things count.

The statement of your correspondent that the idea of a subject catalogue has been abandoned is so melancholy a one that it can only be hoped that Mr. Fortescue's words have been misinterpreted. Great as would be the undertaking of such a catalogue to the millions of volumes in the national collection, it is a necessity if that collection is to be of the fullest service. In days when classification—card-indexing and filing systems—is said to be one of the secrets of success in business there is something ironical in the abandonment of a project the carrying out of which is essential to the fullest utilisation

of a great collection of books. The greater the collection the greater the necessity. The usefulness of the London Library has been doubled by the publication of Dr. Hagberg Wright's fine "Subject Index." It is to be hoped that the abandonment decision, if it has really been made, will be reversed. This, it seems to me, is the most serious count in your correspondent's indictment of the British Museum Library management, though that regarding the constitution of the Museum is one that calls for consideration of a new constitution more in accord with the spirit of the time. Might not the present constitution be relegated to the Fossil Department?—Yours, &c.,

WALTER JERROLD.

Hampton-on-Thames, Jan. 24.

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MORNING POST, FRIDAY, JANUARY 26, 1912.

BRITISH MUSEUM LIBRARY.

VALUE OF A SUBJECT INDEX DOUBTED.

Archdeacon Cunningham, President of the Royal Historical Society, in discussing the suggestions made in these columns last week by a correspondent as to certain possible reforms in the administration of the British Museum Library, pointed out yesterday to a *Morning Post* representative that in considering whether they were or were not desirable it was essential to get a clear idea for what class of reader the Library was intended to cater. "I have come to this conclusion," he said, "as a result of considerable experience with library administration. It is my opinion that if a library is to be successfully administered it must aim particularly at a definite class, though not necessarily to the exclusion of the rest. As I disagree fundamentally with most of your correspondent's recommendations I should like to consider the point in some detail. I would postulate that the Museum is primarily intended for scholars, who have a good knowledge of books and who come to it knowing exactly whose work it is they wish to consult. Your correspondent has pointed out that the reader is apt to be confused by the present arrangement of the Reading Room. He would, I think, be much more confused by the presence on the shelves of a subject index. Such a work would be unwieldy, and, to return to my main contention, the scholar who is working either at his own subject or even at one with which he is comparatively unfamiliar does not need it. The place of a subject index is far better supplied as regards the novice by the bibliographies attached to articles in encyclopædias, or by special bibliographies or by the references in text-books. The argument that the Museum authorities make use of the Surgeon-General's catalogue does not convince me. The Americans are experts at subject cataloguing, so why not leave the work to them and make use of their labours instead of making the Museum staff spend their time in doing a similar compilation for the British Museum? Its Library is not and should not be arranged for the benefit of the reader who wishes hurriedly to get up information on a particular subject. Nor indeed is it my experience that the professional researchers, who are often called upon to undertake work of this character, want such a compilation. I believe they would pass it by and make use of the smaller bibliographies with which they are familiar.

"I am more in sympathy with the points raised about appointments made to the Library staff, and though I should have thought that men of real ability would be able to qualify themselves rapidly for the work of a librarian, it would perhaps be an advantage if the Museum had men trained outside occasionally drafted into it. But I am afraid that drawbacks would outweigh advantages. The staff would inevitably resent being passed over, and the harmonious working of the institution would be endangered with no very tangible good to show for the risk incurred."

GAPS IN THE COLLECTION.

"With what your correspondent writes about gaps in the collection, I am more in sympathy. As I have the advantage of first-rate libraries at Cambridge, I seldom use the Museum Library except for out-of-the-way publications. To take an illustration, I wanted quite recently an article published in the Journal of the Banffshire Field Club. This was not in the Museum. There is a considerable amount of valuable material contained in the Journals of the smaller societies, and it is often information that is not available elsewhere. Steps should, I think, be taken to ensure that the Museum had copies of all these publications.

"To return to another aspect of the catalogue question. I have noticed with regret that the authors catalogue is becoming increasingly difficult to use. The additions made to it are confusing, and one is apt to miss books. I believe it is much more important to keep this catalogue thoroughly revised, and that this is much better worth the undertaking than the compilation of a subject index.

"Lastly, as regards what your correspondent described as the discomforts of the Reading Room. Many of these are, I think, matters of opinion. Thus, to give a single example. I have heard many complaints about the ventilation of the Reading Room, but I have myself rather a horror of the fresh air enthusiasts, and I have an uneasy feeling that the system of ventilation which would appeal to them would lay me up with an attack of bronchitis."

TO THE EDITOR OF THE MORNING POST.

SIR,—The interview on the question of reforming the British Museum methods which appeared in Monday's *Morning Post* contains one or two slight errors which may be worth recording, particularly as they tend to strengthen your article. The age limit is twenty-one years, not twenty; modern fiction is not issued for five years, instead of two years as stated; and the reference to Battezatti's Classification is the other

way about. It had apparently been destroyed, while the bibliographic portion had been preserved.

There is one point which I should like to mention, as a further method of increasing the efficiency of the Museum Library. Most casual readers are confused and more or less hindered by the absence of proper guides to the books kept on open shelves in the large room. Nothing appears on the bookcases except here and there a number which represents a tier. Furthermore, the classification is crude in the extreme, and it is quite possible to find a single shelf with books on music, architecture, painting, and pottery all in higgledy-piggledy order. This is a most unscientific and unbusiness-like arrangement, and I should like to suggest that the whole of the books in the Reading Room should be accurately re-classified, all the books on the one topic kept together, and each shelf labelled to show distinctly what it contains. This would do away with the spectacle of people wandering about like lost sheep, would greatly expedite the service of readers, and would tend to make the room much more like a library and less like a maze for perturbed students. The Reading Room is already a most depressing department, which seems to be haunted by the ghosts and influences of disappointed students and others.

One more practical detail might be offered for consideration, and that is a general instruction for all readers who remove books from the shelves to reading tables to leave them there for the assistants to replace. This method has been found convenient and workable in municipal libraries, and it also enables statistics to be kept, if thought desirable, of the number of books actually consulted.—Yours, &c.,

JAMES DUFF BROWN.

Central Library, Holloway-road, Jan. 25.

TO THE EDITOR OF THE MORNING POST.

SIR,—What a meek-spirited multitude the regular readers at the British Museum are. After two days experience I hail with delight Dr. Waller's criticism in your issue of Monday. May I add that I resent being told in superior tones that the Museum does not profess to keep reports and periodicals up to date? Why not, please, since they file to date even daily newspapers in our London municipal libraries? After scouring the catalogue, last Thursday, under every possible heading, for the annual public health reports of Liverpool, Glasgow, and Bradford, I was told they were not catalogued, but I could get them next day if I wrote the mystic words "old copyright office" in the place of press marks. I persevered, only to be told next day that the reports of Glasgow, Bradford, and Leeds were not in the Museum, but I could have Cornwall.

My most serious complaint against the Library, however, is its closeness. I cannot imagine how people can work in that hot, dry air. Of course, the Library is delightfully quiet, but surely it might be properly ventilated as well.—Yours, &c.,

C. C. TOWNSHEND.

36a, Longridge-road, Earl's-court, Jan. 25.

TO THE EDITOR OF THE MORNING POST.

SIR,—The Library of the British Museum being the only large library which does not at the same time let books leave the building is of a universal and unique importance to the scientific world. Any improvement in this institution must be a matter of serious concern to British citizens and to students of all countries, as well as to the administration itself—but the first condition of success is a mutual understanding and consensus of both interested parties—the readers and the administration. It is, therefore, rather harmful to the cause when both irrational and irksome criticisms of the institution and staff are made. I refer to the interview and letter published in your issue of January 22. The writer of the letter complains that there are some tedious and cumbersome formalities of admission and that he was not instantly allowed in after stating to the doorkeeper his titles and degrees. The Reading Room, as a matter of fact, is a very democratic institution, and anyone can easily obtain admission, if a nominal guarantee of his character and purpose is forthcoming. But there must be some rule of admission, and the Reading Room cannot be open to everyone, without control or qualification, merely on his verbal representation to the doorkeeper, because this would expose the treasures of the Library to serious danger of Vandalism and make work for genuine students impossible. The Reading Room cannot be at the same time a cheap and well-heated club for idle novel readers, for people who want to consult directories, talk, and walk about, and a place where scholars and students have to carry out toilsome and strenuous research. It is useless to try to change the *raison d'être* of the Library in its foundation; it is, and will remain, the reference place of the scientific student, and not an elementary institution for general education.

One remark in the aforementioned interview refers to the attendants of the Reading Room. As far as my own experience goes there is no reason to complain about favouritism or partiality on their part. I have received much kindness from many of them, and have never met with incivility or unjustified refusal of attention. Compared with Continental service, the standard of the British Museum is much higher. After all, even the attendants of the Reading Room are human, and it is, to say the least of it, unreasonable to expect angelic perfection. For most complaints the overstrained nerves of the readers are certainly responsible—a circumstance that ought, however, to induce the attendants to show extreme patience, which they indeed often accomplish.

The points raised in your correspondent's article—the necessity of continuing the subject catalogue; lengthening the hours of service; giving out books at any time; better and quicker system of acquiring foreign books—are certainly vital points, and all readers undoubtedly hope that they will receive careful attention, for which purpose a Royal Commission will no doubt be the best means. But it is useless to prejudice the case, and to irritate the administration and staff by expressing chimerical wishes, and making unreasonable charges.

May I add one point from my own experience? My eyesight is very bad, and I suffer extremely

through the bad lighting of the Reading Room. The system there is highly irrational, all lights being either lit or put out simultaneously. Considering that there are great differences in the intensity of daylight in different parts of the Reading Room, and that there are enormous differences in the sensitiveness of the human retina, it would seem quite a natural and elementary requirement of oculistic hygiene to allow each reader to switch on or off the lights for himself.—Yours, &c.,

Jan. 25. B. MALINOWSKI, Ph.D.

TO THE EDITOR OF THE MORNING POST.

SIR,—It is common knowledge that those who are satisfied with arrangements, in whatever matter it may be, rarely take up a pen to express that satisfaction, but I feel that it is not altogether just to the British Museum Reading Room authorities to allow the statements of Mr. James Duff Brown to go unchallenged. He states that the bulk of the staff "regard the public use of the Library as a necessary evil"; as one, who for many months past has used the Readers' Room daily from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. I say emphatically that statement is as unfounded as it is uncalled for. It would be impossible to find a set of gentlemen who take a greater interest in their work, who are more assiduous in attending to the often unreasonable wants and requests of the reader, or who take such unlimited trouble in finding the necessary books or references required by that reader.

Much has been said on the advisability of having a "subject index," that of course, would be carried *nem. con.*, but, failing that desirable addition to the Library—which is bound to come sooner or later—the present staff form a subject index in themselves. Mr. Brown is apparently unaware that the staff are compelled to pass a very stiff examination, and in order to be qualified to enter for that examination, must have taken University honours. If that will not help make a man a good librarian, I fail to see how a commercial training would effect that desired result. The amount of work done by the staff is not measured necessarily by that accomplished in the Readers' Room itself—(which is sufficiently onerous)—where they are expected to be walking encyclopædias, but there are many other duties they perform unseen in connection with the Library.

Mr. Brown says there are very many books which ought to be in the Library, but are not to be found; but he naïvely adds: "Within my own experience the deficiencies are chiefly in French, German, and the Old English books." However, when one comes to analyse this complaint, it amounts to this: that because Mr. Brown has asked for some foreign book, and has been unable to procure it, he blames the Museum authorities for not having had the prescience to obtain a copy. It must be obvious to this gentleman that to anticipate the wants of every reader in the matter of foreign works would entail the purchase of the world's output of books. A suggestion book is kept in the Readers' Room, and if a reader is unable to obtain a book from the Library because it is not there, he has but to enter his name, and the title of the book required, and in the majority of cases it is procured for the Library.

Another charge made by Mr. Brown is that of favouritism on the part of the staff towards certain readers, and he proceeds to quote what he calls a remarkable instance that occurred to him. He says: "I had half a dozen books on my desk, and had requisitioned other volumes, when to my surprise a note was brought, saying that I could not have any more books out; my neighbour had on his desk a far larger number." In reply to that complaint, it is a well-known fact that if the morning is dark, books cannot be taken from the corridors in which they are, as, there being no artificial light, the attendants, naturally, cannot see the titles and "press mark." It is only in those circumstances that books cannot be supplied; and I unhesitatingly say from my own knowledge, that there is practically no limit to the number of books a reasonable reader may have out at the same time. Very possibly his neighbour was using books "kept" from the night before, or applied for them when the light was better. If there be any ground for his statement of favouritism—which I deny—it could only be that a cheerful reader is naturally more popular than one who, abusing a great privilege, does not treat the staff with the courtesy their own attention and civility deserve.—Yours, &c.,

ARTHUR H. ENGELBACH.

Surbiton, Jan. 25.

TO THE EDITOR OF THE MORNING POST.

SIR,—I have been specially interested in the articles and correspondence you have published on the British Museum Library because I know it to be the best conducted library of Europe. My experience with it goes back to the days when Panizzi was still among us. Later I had the privilege of numbering Dr. Garnett among my close personal friends, and he was one of the first to help me with the foundation of the Dante Society. So I think I am right in feeling sure that your correspondent has made out things to be very much worse than they are.

I am not very particular about a subject index because a clever man can always find what he wants by bibliographies and catalogues. But here is a very serious point. When I buy foreign books from Continental publishers for my pupils I get them at a reduction of 33⅓ per cent. The British Museum buys thousands of such books, and it should get a still greater reduction, or, in other words, acquire all the volumes it wants at half the published price. At present the Museum pays the full price, and is charged at the rate of a shilling for the franc, at the lowest reckoning 50 per cent. more than ought to be paid. I think, too, the authorities would be wise to put out their binding contracts to tender.

I do not find that there are many books I want which are not in the Museum, and whenever I have found that a book I wanted was not in the Museum it has always been sent for, and I have had it in a few days. I do, however, feel that there is some little delay before readers are able to get a newly-published book.

I do not agree with your correspondent in wanting the Museum open until later than it is now. The attendants would be quite worn out if the same set of men had to do the work; to double the staff would be an enormous expense, and I am sure very few people would make use of it. I have, indeed, only praise and gratitude for the Museum authorities. I know of no institution in Europe where there is such kindliness and friendship and such a desire to help, and further where the rooms are so clean and the reader so comfortable.—Yours, &c.,

Jan. 25. LUIGI RICCI.

ORNING POST, SATURDAY, JANUARY 27, 1912.

BRITISH MUSEUM LIBRARY.

INSUFFICIENT TREASURY GRANT.

Mr. J. Y. W. Macalister, the editor of "The ibrary" and Secretary and Consulting Libra-ian of the Royal Society of Medicine, discussed esterday with a *Morning Post* representative he reforms in the administration of the British Iuseum Library, which were suggested last eek, and which have been reinforced in the any letters that have been published on the ibject. "Any criticism," he said, "directed gainst the efficiency and ability of the Library aff only shows ignorance of the difficulties and mitations of their position. Anyone who knows e conditions under which the Museum is rried on must be deeply grateful to the staff. e British Museum Library as a place for work far and away ahead of any other national brary that I have ever visited. In my opinion ry little can be done to improve it until the gislature realises the importance of the place a national institution and treats it more berally. The staff are always anxious to fill up ps in the collection. I have known of more an one instance in which members of it have ade purchases at their own expense, and either esented their acquisitions to the Museum or ited for repayment until the next subsidy came due. Not long ago there was a unique portunity of acquiring a collection at a low ice which the vendor was perfectly willing accept, but the year's appropriation was eady exhausted, and he could not wait until next Treasury grant fell due, and so the llection went at a higher price to America.

"As regards a Subject Index, I entirely dis-ree with your correspondent. On a technical estion of that kind it is only the opinion of perts of long experience which is worth listen-; to, and the fact that Dr. Fortescue and, understand, Dr. Hagberg Wright have both nounced against it should be enough to swer this demand. Instead of a Subject Index ich would, I believe with Dr. Fortescue, be indrance rather than a help to students, I uld like to see bibliographies compiled either a special staff added to the Museum, or by the ious learned societies. This would be prac-ble if the Treasury were to make grants to societies on the condition of their under-ing the work. The mere fact that they ld almost certainly include books not in the Museum would be a positive advantage, as it would indicate what books ought to be added to the collection. By advocating a Subject Index for the Museum Library your correspondent, if successful, would not only delay any possibility of this for at least sixty or seventy years (I base my calculation on the time which it took Dr. Wright, with his immense energy and enthusiasm, to compile a Subject Index for the London Library), but you would bury the living books, which may be estimated at a quarter of the collection, under the titles of the dead books. It is quite right that a national mausoleum should preserve these books, but it would be quite wrong to waste the time of workers in delving through an index of them to find what he needed.

"As to your correspondent's suggestion that books should be systematically recommended for purchase by experts in subjects, regardless of language, I agree. I think, too, that there is much to be said for his suggestion that the constitution of the Museum requires reform. And in this connection the American principle of having a school of librarianship attached to the big libraries has a great deal to recommend it. There would be much to be said for making the post a first-class Civil Service appointment open to competition (without nomination), and it might be possible to arrange that the successful candidates should be required to undergo a year's work in the mechanical side of librarianship in other libraries before they began their duties in the Museum—this would only enhance the value of their scholarship. A system of interchange of assistants for fixed periods in other (including foreign) libraries is also worth considering.

"The suggestion that the Library should be open later is thoroughly sound. I would have it open all night if there were a real demand for it, but it would be grossly unfair, as well as stupid, to throw any more on the already heavily-worked staff. I would suggest that the day staff should be released at a reasonable hour, and that an evening staff of attendants come on duty when the others leave. This would enable those already in the Library to continue their labours, and for others who could only arrive late it should not be difficult to arrange that, if they sent their lists of needs in advance, their books would be put out in readiness for them.

"The duty of keeping publishers up to the scratch should not be imposed on the librarians; it is a waste of good material. Why should not the publishers pay their taxes like other honest citizens? Let proof of copyright depend on production of the Museum's receipt of a new book dated within one month of its publication, and this evil, and consequent stupid outlay,

would disappear.

"Please, however, to bear in mind that it is not the Library staff that needs reforming, but the Government. So long as the State starves the Library, and the Museum, too, for that matter, the restricted public, for which alone it ought to cater, will not reap the benefit it should reap from the collection. The staff is asked to make sacrifices which no Government has a right to demand of it, and is doing it daily in an ungrudging way that does not win the recognition it deserves. In his attempt to reform the Museum staff your correspondent is ill-advised, but if his effort succeeds in reforming the attitude of Parliament, and, through Parliament, the Treasury, he will have helped in righting a great wrong and in benefiting the public."

TO THE EDITOR OF THE MORNING POST.

SIR,—While it is difficult for me to establish a satisfactory comparison as to relative library economy my experience here, on the Continent, and in the United States inclines me to a preference for British Museum methods. The librarian of the admirably organised Washington Library, whom I last visited some four years ago, felt as I did, while at the same time calling attention to the improved methods in many ways held out by the as yet unopened New York institution. I remember that he laid particular stress upon the advantageous decision arrived at by Dr. Billings and his able staff to devote separate rooms to different sections of study, such as Chemistry, Electricity, Genealogy, &c. My friend, Mr. Bjeorgaard, the assistant librarian and manager of the Astor Library Reading Rooms, pointed to the fact that these particular room sub-divisions, each with its own specially prepared catalogue, in addition to all the other catalogues, would not only simplify and expedite the general work but ensure great economy.

Neither the Berlin, Vienna, nor the newly-organised Departmental French Libraries need be spoken of in this connection, and I think I can say in truth that none of the five large Paris general libraries can, on pretty much any head, lay claims to superiority over the British Museum. I have been shown by Mr. Pollard the interior of the last-named, just as I have been taken through the interiors of the Bibliotheque Nationale by Mr. Omont and Mr. de la Roncière, the Sainte Geneviéve by Mr. Boinet, the Arsenal by Mr. Brentano, the Mazarine by Mr. Marais, and the Sorbonne by Mr. Chatelain and Mr. Renault. I had occasion to go over several quite frequently during my last 15 months stay in Paris, and I must say all testified to the superior advantages possessed by the British Museum.

None of the European libraries I have alluded to are provided with such an admirable printed catalogue as that of the British Museum. The preparation of that catalogue, which is said to have covered 21 years of incessant work, has fully repaid the time devoted to it. Whether there is now needed a subject catalogue of works published since 1880 is open to question. Familiar as I am with Poole's Index and other similar publications I have, with the aid of the two separate general reference subject sets now on the central reading-room stands, been able to meet all requirements. There should, of course, be lodged here two copies of all publications, as is rigidly done in the United States under the Copyright Act.

As to the closing hours I hope they will be extended to 10 p.m. In New York the library is closed at nine. In Paris most libraries open at ten or 11 a.m., and generally close at this season as early as 4 p.m. I have even had to cease work some days at the Mazarine at 3 p.m. The Ste. Geneviéve is the only one which, like the Arts et Métiers, closes after five, to reopen again until ten o'clock.

Summing up everything I favour the British Museum Library over all others, especially for its present very extensive catalogue facilities, its very liberal rules governing the procuring and keeping of books, the prompt responses given to the desiderata, its abundance of readers' desk supplies, and its very satisfactory other departments, but I deprecate the custom of charging for the privilege of making photographs and other reproductions, which prevails nowhere else that I know of. In Paris especially I have found all the libraries ready to extend permission to copy, gratis, whatever has been needed, and in the Bibliotheque Nationale there is quite an extensive plant of photographic and other apparatus for the purpose.—Yours, &c.,

P. F. MOTTELAY.

17, Gloucester-crescent, Jan. 26.

TO THE EDITOR OF THE MORNING POST.

SIR,—I cannot help feeling that if a great subject index were compiled it would be of use to the experienced student and worker, though not perhaps to the casual reader. The latter individual we need not consider, the Library not being there for him. But as to the experienced student, I should agree rather with Mr. Fortescue, whose feeling seems to be that a huge subject index would be overwhelming through its fullness, and rather a hindrance than an assistance, and therefore not worth the great labour and expense involved. I would ask does the experienced student or working specialist need this great general subject catalogue. I can see that the outside searcher or inquirer might find it useful, but the actual student or specialist, so far as he needs subject indexes, has the special bibliographies of his own subject, which he probably uses habitually. The subject catalogue of a library simply shows, or purports to show (which is not quite the same thing), all the books the library possesses on a given subject. What practical worker wants to know that? That is a matter more directly interesting the bibliographer and librarian. What the student commonly wants to know is whether the library possesses certain works which he wishes to consult. For these he turns over the pages of the general catalogue.

A student working at any subject, whether it be international arbitration, evolution, aviation, or the

Hittite problem, does not want to know the titles of all the books and pamphlets the Museum possesses on that subject. That knowledge would be very little direct help to him in his study. He wants to study or refer to certain specific works, and the general catalogue tells him if these are in the Library or not. If the student is no more than an intelligent outsider he would never help himself forward by perusing a list of hundreds or even thousands of titles. That would only hinder him. He would turn to a cyclopædia, or some everyday book of reference, from which he would quickly learn who were the leading writers, classical and popular, on the subject in question, and that is all the knowledge he needs to start from. These writers quote hundreds of others, and he has at once all the names he needs.

Moreover, a subject index must be classified into larger and smaller groups, and the student soon finds there are numerous smaller groups under which works he may want might be found. He finds he must consult several headings, he has to grasp the system of classification that is used, to find what headings are likely to serve him, he is worried by numerous cross-references and by the consciousness that subjects overlap, and that he can never know whether he has properly exhausted the catalogue. This is not a comfortable condition before the huge mass of printed literature nowadays available, especially when most workers find that time is all too short for reading that which is ready to hand. The worker is therefore apt to shrug his shoulders and pass the "subject catalogue" by.—Yours, &c., A. HASTINGS WHITE.

Jan. 26.

TO THE EDITOR OF THE MORNING POST.

SIR,—The question which has been raised in your correspondence as to whether a library should be in a position to state what works it possesses on a given subject with the same certainty with which it can reply to questions as to its possession or not of a book of given authorship is one that hardly admits of a simple answer. It contains in itself an important ambiguity, viz., the expression "what works it possesses on a given subject." Now, a student who comes to a library asks for something different; he says, "In what works shall I find anything about a given subject?" The former question can usually be attempted by members of a library staff, either directly or by reference to ordinary sources of information; the latter question, in general, cannot.

My answer to the question is that a library should not (because it cannot) be in a position to state . . . with the same certainty . . . as a book of given authorship. In the latter case there can be no doubt or ambiguity, if the author's name is fully and correctly given. But subjects do not lend themselves so readily to necessary sequence. The question is a very large one, not to be disposed of in a letter. But does your correspondent wish for a classed subject catalogue or an alphabetical one? If the former, he must answer Professor H. W. Chandler's "Some Observations on the Bodleian Classed Catalogue" (Oxford, 1888), in which a good many confused ideas are exposed to a searching criticism.

Supposing him to mean an alphabetical catalogue of subjects, that is a desirable thing to have. But it is an expensive thing. It needs much co-operation of many specialists (for done perfunctorily it is worse than useless). And it seems (as no library is complete in the literature of any subject) likely to be less useful when compiled than a universal subject catalogue or index compiled by the co-operation of at least many of the great libraries. This can be done, and is done, for certain subjects. It might be done for more. The contents of a subject catalogue should be co-extensive with the literature of the subject, not with what happen to be the contents of a particular library. Watt's "Bibliotheca Britannica" is a well-known instance of a useful work of the kind—useful still after nearly a century.

I am, unfortunately, seldom in London; I do not manage to work at the Museum more than once or twice a year—usually less at a subject than a book; so I am not able to judge of some of the matters referred to by your correspondent. But as to the method of appointment, I venture to think a University man, of the right sort, is as good material as can be obtained. Only sometimes the regulations (which I fancy are not British Museum regulations) contrive to cut out men exceptionally well fitted for the work. You want a man with an enthusiasm for his profession: nothing else can make library work tolerable or effective.—Yours, &c., FRANCIS JENKINSON.

Jan. 26.

P.S.—A subject catalogue of which the units are books is of little use, and induces a false sense of security.

TO THE EDITOR OF THE MORNING POST.

SIR,—I have read with interest the articles on the management of the British Museum Reading Room. There is no doubt that many of the shortcomings to which your correspondent alludes are the indirect consequence of the constitution of its Board of Management. If any reform in this direction is effected I would suggest that, among other interests, those ot engineering literature, which forms such an important part of our educational resources, should be adequately represented. The great technical societies of the country (such as the Institutions of Civil, Mechanical, and Electrical Engineers, the Naval Architects and the Iron and Steel Institute) might each be represented in whatever committee deals with the selection and classification of works of a technical nature, and thus ensure for the future a more systematic and complete method of dealing with this important branch of literature than has obtained in the past. It might also be arranged that certain members of the permanent staff should be drawn from graduates who have taken an engineering degree at one of the recognised Universities.—Yours, &c., R. W. DANA.

5, Adelphi-terrace, Jan. 26.

TO THE EDITOR OF THE MORNING POST.

SIR,—As I have worked with some regularity in the Reading Room of the British Museum since the late Seventies, I should be glad, with your permission, to take part in the correspondence which you are publishing on points of desirable reform. With Sir Sidney Lee's statement that the requisite changes are of an administrative kind I am in complete agreement. While there is little fault to be found with the general management of the Library, it has its defects in respect of speed and accessibility. There is too much concentration about the arrangements, with the result that delays occur which might be avoided under a less cumbersome system.

The crying need is the creation of a periodical room, in which publications could be taken down from the shelves. If one wants to look up some article in, say, the *English Historical Review*, of the exact date of which one is not quite sure, it is wearisome to have to write out a ticket covering several years, to wait for twenty minutes or half an hour, only to discover,

perhaps that one has missed after all, the object of one's inquiry. At the admirable Library of the Patent Office a free run of the shelves is given. An article on horology or hydraulics can be turned up in five minutes, while the proximity of other publications dealing with those subjects often leads to further discoveries. The periodical room should also, as Sir Sidney Lee contends, include the transactions of learned societies, which are at present to be disinterred with some trouble from under the unwieldy heading of Academies.

Is it too much to ask, again, that the catalogue in the Reading Room should cease to abound in unnecessary complications? You want to know the constituency represented by a certain M.P. in the Eighties. A back number of "Whitaker's Almanack" occurs to you as a profitable source of investigation. You naturally look up Whitaker. What do you find? "See Ephemerides." Having seen "Ephemerides," you have to run your eye down several columns before you light upon the almanack associated with the familiar name of Joseph Whitaker, F.S.A. A positive genius for mystification was required to devise entries of such subtlety. But the recollection that Sir Anthony Panizzi was an Italian conspirator before he took to cataloguing may possibly explain this and other instances of the *obscurum per obscurius*. They must be intended for secret passwords.—Yours, &c., LLOYD SANDERS.

Jan. 26.

TO THE EDITOR OF THE MORNING POST.

SIR,—I should be glad if you would give publicity to the following very real source of annoyance to users of the British Museum Library. One may apply for a book at, say, three o'clock. At 3.30 one's ticket is planted down on the desk marked "large room," "see catalogue," &c., and then one has got to pack up and be off, because after 3.30 (in winter) no books are issued. And why should one not have access to books only shown in the large room up to five o'clock? It is most annoying to be forced to drop work at that early hour because, for some unexplained reason, the large room must be shut at that time. As there is electric light all over the place the lighting can have nothing to do with the rule, although I fancy it must have originated with it in the olden times.—Yours, &c.,

AN OLD READER.

The British Museum Library, Jan. 26.

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