

NOTES OF TRAVEL.—VII.

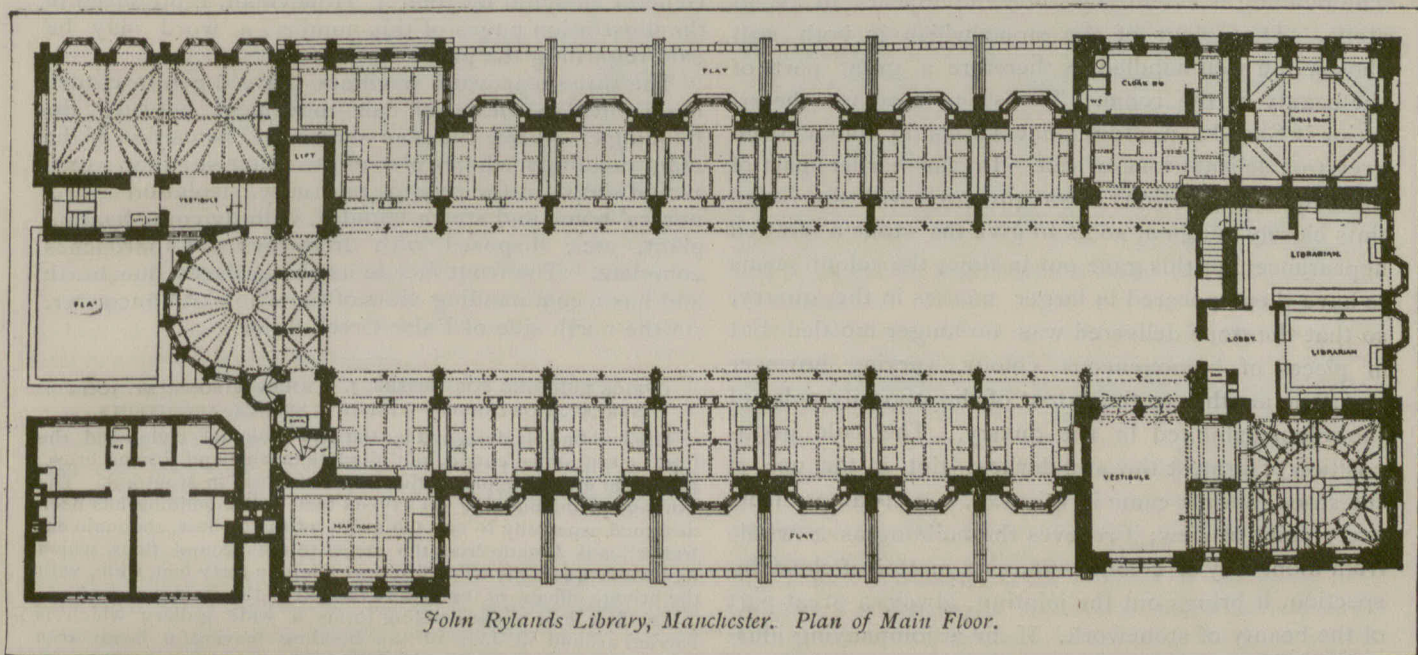
THE JOHN RYLANDS LIBRARY, MANCHESTER.

If this is not the most interesting recent building in England, one would like to see the building which is of greater interest. Mr. Basil Champneys, the architect, appears to have had a pretty free hand in the matter of both expense and time, (the library was nine years in building), and, though a definite lead was given which suggested the style, it was a style which suited the designer and he has worked quite freely in it. It is gothic; but English gothic, which still seems quite at home in England, when properly handled. The plan is rather suggestive of a church plan and the style is early, yet the building has a thoroughly modern air; there is no archaic feeling about it.

The Library is rather a repository for rare books than a place for distributing current literature. Its strength is in early printed books, an "unrivalled collection"; a collection of Aldines, "believed to be the finest in existence"; a Bible collection comprising, besides some MSS., copies of the successive printed editions; in first editions of the classics of English literature; early maps and atlases; the Early Fathers; early Service Books; in fact in books which are the fountains of study in their various fields and are consulted only by scholars. For this purpose the building is perfect.

under the Librarian's rooms in the plan, was intended to be imposing, but has failed because the stairs are not visible on sight and are in a chamber which is too close and contributes but little light to the entrance. If the stairs were open, and the light came from there, it would have been a fine entrance hall; as it is it is only a vestibule, large but gloomy. There is no hall.

The main floor, which is both reading room and book room, is shown in the plan and a photographic view is given in the illustration sheets. The books are contained in alcoves. There are two tiers of alcoves, each with a bay window filled with square leading of a delicately tinted whitish green glass, with a bull's-eye in every quarry. The upper alcoves are reached by a narrow stone gallery which makes below a sort of columned and vaulted vestibule or screen to the alcoves on the main floor. This gallery runs all round; the piers, or buttresses, which carry the vaulting, are pierced with openings for its passage. There is no continuous wall; the two stories of bay windows dispose of the continuity of the outer wall; the vaulting is carried on piers, about 2 ft. 3 in. by 6 ft., which are stayed by the gallery, by the arches and vaulted roof of the upper alcove, (which is itself buttressed between the bay windows), and by arches turned between the piers themselves, over the clear story windows. The alcoves are not divided by walls but arched openings



John Rylands Library, Manchester. Plan of Main Floor.

The plan of the main floor (taken from THE BUILDER) which is shown here, shows the distinctive feature of the building in the way in which the body of the great Reading Room is recessed. The building is free on both sides, lying between two narrow streets; but ancient lights in the premises across these streets; and the need of abundant light in the reading room, required it to be set back about 12 ft. from the building line of the sides. The ground floor rooms are kept in the centre also; they are approached by vaulted corridors along the sides, (the roofs of which appear in the plan), which are kept down to 9 feet in internal height, so that there is space (some 10 feet) above them for lighting the ground floor rooms. These rooms are a lecture room—close to the entrance—committee rooms, and minor rooms for storage of books and for reading. The ground floor is one flight of steps above the entrance, which has a level of its own near the level of the street. The entrance, which takes the whole space

filled by bookcases; and the floor between the two tiers, inside of the gallery, is of wood. The two tiers of alcoves are only 30 feet high and the main vaulting is 44, so that there is room for a large clear story window. No space is occupied by a wooden roof for there is none over either aisles or nave; the stone vaulting is finished to a level with concrete and covered with asphalt. There is no point of view from which the roof can be seen, except perhaps in front; and a pair of towers, with, I believe, a parapet wall between, obstruct any view from this point. There is something unusual also in the position of these towers. They are not set over the outermost area of the double squares, which flank the entrance on both sides, but over the inner square of each; the outer square in each case is a lantern, nestling, as it were, at the base of the tower, (an odd-looking arrangement,) and lighting in one case the staircase and in the other (apparently) the Bible Room. The towers have no internal signifi-