

Birmingham's Public Buildings—Library to Left.



Edinburgh's Dignified Library.

## THE MUSINGS OF A LIBRARIAN

First of Three Articles.

By ANDREW BRAID, WINDSOR PUBLIC LIBRARIAN

PUBLIC libraries began for me with the parish library of my native village in Scotland, over thirty-five years ago. The books occupied a cupboard which extended along one of the walls of the village school—or rather, the “wee” room (i.e., junior room) of the two which made up that seminary of learning. At this distance of time, I should say the library was composed of about four or five hundred volumes. How it originated and where the books came from I cannot tell, but I know there were no additions to the library during the time I was a reader, because I took out the same books over and over again for want of new material. There was a happy absence of all formalities and equipment in the way of catalogues and by-laws, guarantors' cards and borrowers' cards, and no fee

One of the most faithful frequenters of the library was an unfortunate woman, a resident of the village, whose love for reading was equalled only by her love for drink. When spending part of my summer vacation one year in Edinburgh, I invested a shilling in fifty penny numbers of Wilson's “Tales of the Borders,” and these were read over and over again by Kirsty; indeed, she began to fall back on my slender collection of books in the intervals between the monthly circulation from the schoolroom library. I believe I felt not a little pride that I, a schoolboy, was able to lend books to a grown-up person; and Kirsty returned them clean and unmarked.

Among us boys, a tattered book on ships was always in circulation. It was illustrated with pictures of all sorts of craft, from Roman galleys to the latest type of paddle-wheeled steamers; and these pictures we tried to follow, always without success, when whittling out toy ships down by the side of our little river. Scott's “Tales of a Grandfather,” “Robinson Crusoe,” and the “Arabian Nights,” without illustrations, unfortunately, were also eagerly sought after by the boys, and the “Tales” set us to acting the parts of Wallace and Bruce and Prince Charlie in the fields and woods near by; while some very large stones in the river made capital Crusoe islands where one could be “monarch of all he surveyed.” A boy's imagination is a wonderful thing. Where a man sees only a drab-coloured stream, dotted with stones and running between banks of coarse grass, studded with stunted willow bushes, a boy finds an ocean, with seaports from which he can send forth his argosies and armadas to distant lands or to the “Islands of the Blest.” One of these stones is a Gibraltar, another is a Salamis, still another a St. Helena. Amongst a clump of willow bushes he can fancy himself in an African jungle or a South American swamp, infested with lions or jaguars according to the continent he has transformed it into.

Most of the juvenile literature in the library, however, was of a namby-pamby kind that would not be tolerated now even in a Sunday School library, with pictures of preposterous little boys in

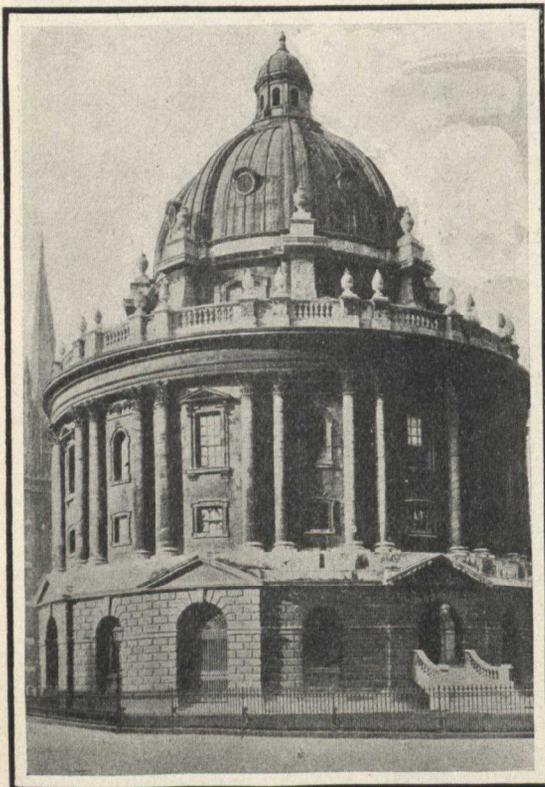
absurdly big tassel caps and small jackets and short trousers, making stilted and highflown speeches to equally preposterous little girls in equally absurd short frocks, below which could be seen the ridiculously-long nether garments that then formed part of a girl's costume.

The books were of a solid class of literature, few novels, except by first-rank authors, being amongst them. I recollect there were a number of volumes of a “Saturday Journal,” “Chambers' Miscellany,” Hugh Miller's works, and about a dozen of the books of those popular mid-nineteenth century authors, Peter Parley and Old Humphrey. David did not have a greater longing for a draught from the well of Bethlehem than I have now for a sight of “Old Humphrey's Walks in London”! In one of the volumes of the “Saturday Journal” I recall an article on wigs, but all that has remained in my mind of this article are the lines which were quoted therein:

“Oh Absalom, oh Absalom,  
Oh Absalom, my son!  
If thou hadst worn a periwig  
Thou hadst not been undone.”

Scott's novels were conscientiously attempted by me in those days, but I confess I was daunted by the dreary introductions and opening chapters. Even “The Antiquary” proved too much for me, although the opening scene of the coach travelling from Edinburgh to Queensferry, both of these places being in our countryside, had been a bait to lure me into taking the book from the library. Not until I reached my teens did I have the courage to wade through the uninteresting beginnings of the Waverley novels, to discover they were but like dreary paths leading to the Land of Enchantment, where one can ride forth with King Richard in Palestine, Quentin Durward in France, Ivanhoe in England, or Bonnie Prince Charlie in Scotland.

Last summer, I visited my native village after an absence of twenty-four years, and one of my most interesting experiences was to handle some of these old books. The library has long since been closed; but I went into the old school-room, and as I looked around the desks amid which I had droned through lessons, and took up the volumes I had read, my thoughts went back to school days and delightful library evenings. I “appropriated” a volume of Old Humphrey's essays—may the Recording Angel remember that the library is not now used, and, appreciating my sentimentality, erase the entry from his journal!



The Camera or Radcliffe Library, Oxford.

was charged. The village schoolmaster acted as librarian, devoting part of an evening once a month to exchanging books for readers; an old copy-book did duty for a register, the reader's name and the title of the book taken out being entered therein; and when a book was returned the drawing of a pen through the title was a sufficient record. On these occasions, the schoolroom was a scene of animation—readers recommending the books they were returning to other readers, or consulting one another as to the likelihood of a certain book proving interesting. Ploughmen came from outlying farms, and labourers from hamlets two or three miles distant, so that it was a matter of no small consequence to secure a book or two sufficiently interesting to ensure a month's pleasurable reading.

## Ten Years' Progress in Agriculture

By J. W. WHEATON

THE agricultural progress of a country during a ten-year period is, as a rule, not very strongly marked. One has to cover a much longer time to be able to note the signs of progress with exactness. Canada supplies an exception to this rule. Since 1898 many of the changes in agriculture are clearly and well defined. During that period the farmer's position has materially changed. His calling is on a higher plane. He knows more about his land. He understands better the science of agriculture and brings greater knowledge of methods and means to bear upon his work.

The factors responsible for this improvement are many. In Ontario, the Agricultural College at Guelph, the Farmers' Institute, the Women's Institute, the reorganised agricultural societies, the various live stock, dairy, fruit and kindred associa-

tions, the provincial Winter Fairs at Guelph and Ottawa, the various reports and bulletins sent out by the Department of Agriculture, the agricultural press and other agencies have greatly aided in improving the farmer's position. In the other provinces like agencies have been at work. Agricultural colleges have been established at Truro, Nova Scotia, and at Winnipeg, Manitoba, within the past few years. Last fall the Macdonald Agricultural College at Ste. Anne de Bellevue, Que., was opened. These institutions are daily contributing to the sum total of knowledge of agriculture in Canada. Add to these provincial movements the work being done by the Dominion Department of Agriculture through the Experimental Farms, the Dairy Commissioners', the Live Stock Commissioners' and the Seed Commissioners' branches and we have an organised