THE SOCIETY’S LIBRARY

The Library of an institution is one of its most valuable possessions, whether the aims of the institution are scientific or literary; but it may easily happen that the members’ acquaintance with the resources of their library is confined to special fields of study in which they are interested.

The library of the Royal Society, which is now entering upon the last quarter of the third century of its history, covers a very wide field, as indeed did the discussions of the Society during the first century of its existence. In documents which treat of the Society’s own history and its relations with scientific men in other countries it is extremely rich.

From its foundation the Society began to acquire books. The routine of its early meetings included discussion of recently described observations and experiments. Books relevant to these were obtained. The curator of experiments, Robert Hooke, as we know from his recently published Diary, bought regularly for the Society’s library. Volumes on our shelves carry his note of purchase and the price.

Its Charter authorized the Society to print, at the direction of the President and Council, works written by its Fellows; and copies of these came to the library. In March 1665 the Society’s first Secretary, Henry Oldenburg, began, on his own initiative, the periodical publication of scientific papers brought before the Society. He entitled this issue Philosophical Transactions. They were later continued under the official impress of the Society. They were among the very earliest of that class of publication which subsequently came to bulk so largely and importantly in the progressive history of science. The Philosophical Transactions are indeed the earliest but one of all the serial publications of Academies which have existed unbrokenly from their beginning to the present time. They started a few months later than the Journal des Scavans of Paris. The library has the complete series of both these famous issues. The library also received
accessions from authors by presentation copies. It early received also a noteworthy bequest of books from George Ent, F.R.S., elected 1676.

ARUNDEL COLLECTION

In 1667 the Society was the recipient by gift of an accession to its library of the first magnitude. John Evelyn was an original Fellow, and at his instance, under circumstances which he describes in his Diary, Henry Howard, later sixth Duke of Norfolk, gave to the Society ‘the library of Arundel House, to dispose of as their propriety.’ This was one of the finest private libraries in Europe. It contained a nucleus from the library of Corvinus, King of Hungary, and it consisted of about 2700 printed books and 570 MSS. Part of it had been collected by Bilibald Pirckheymer, a Nuremberg financier, and patron of Albert Dürer. In many of its volumes the book-plate is by Dürer. The large majority of the books were, it is true, not of scientific scope, a fact noted by Evelyn.

In 1830 most of the manuscripts from this collection were transferred to the national collection of manuscripts at the British Museum, and printed books, in exchange, pertaining to science, were obtained to equivalent value. In 1835 some Oriental manuscripts were also transferred to the British Museum. On the installation of the Society in its present house in 1873, the books of non-scientific character in the library were segregated from the rest. They were largely from the Arundel Collection. A special catalogue of them was prepared and printed in 1910. Fourteen years later, they were, with the approval of the Duchess of Norfolk, disposed of by sale. The proceeds were applied to form a fund, known as the Arundel Fund, for the maintenance and improvement of the library; of it the income is now £297. The books of the Arundel Collection which relate to science form a group offering especial interest in the library. Astrology is liberally represented among them, and there is some alchemy. There are among them more than fifty incunabula, scientific and medical. These include a De Proprietatibus of Bartholomaeus Anglicus, printed by Wynkyn de Worde; a fine ‘Macer,’ Liber Macri Philosophi, printed by Arnoldus de Bruxella at Naples, in 1477; a Jacobus de Dondis De Medicina printed at Strasburg 1470, with the Pirckheymer bookplate; and the
Prohemium Baratholomei
de proprietatibus rerum.

Terne all lawde to god greest of myghte
He sete pene of every creature
Whyche of his goodneste lendeth grace
To sondry folk as blissed auenture
Lyghte
Whose spyrte of counsell conforteth full sure
All suche as luste to seke for lapance
And maketh chyrye wyte by grete Intelligencye

As thus where mye full naturally desyre
Of sondry chynges & meruels for to knowe
Of citve of auye of water and of fire
Of erbe & teee which groweth boche hyghte & lowe
And other chynges as nature hath theyn lowe
Of chyple the knowelege comrue by goddis grace
And of all chynges that realoy maple theyn brace

Whay I beholde the chynges naturall
Goodep by grace lent from the holy ghost
Brethely compartment by bobes specyall
As Bartholome we lheveth ete declarye most
Thay I recipe remembrynghe every coste
How some counter hath grete esmodite
Some rote some frute some stroo of hyghte dege

Prayed be god whyche hath to well enduyd
The author whyche de proprietatibus
To se so many naturall chynges renwyd
Whyche in his boke he hath complued thus
Where thouth hy-rendyte we mape comfort vs
And whyche conceuys dyuers fusde our mynde
As bobes empxyntid the wyghte ryght as we synde

By Wykyn de Worde whyche chryh his dyligence
Empryntyd bact at prayer and desyre
Of Roger Thoney merceare and from then
This movay sparyn to sete the heresy at fyr
Of suche a love to reede in every shire
Dyures makers in dopynge yoplnelle

De proprietatis rerum, of Bartholomeus Anglicus; printed at Westminster, by Wynkyn de Worde at prayer and desyre of Roger Thoney merceare, (1495). The book states the paper used was from the paper-mill of John Tate the younger, Hertfordshire. The wire-mark is an 8-pointed star.
magnificent Galen in Greek by Blastus and Callierges, Venice, 1500. Besides the incunabula there are early printings of the next century, including copies of Dürer, and items on navigation and geography, some from Iberian presses. There is a fine copy of Ambroise Paré, with portrait. It is estimated that items of the Norfolk gift in the library to-day total to something like a thousand.

In 1876 the Society transferred to the Library of the India Office some hundreds of Arabic, Persian and Sanskrit manuscripts to be kept there on loan since they would be more accessible, and be more likely to be consulted by students of Oriental literature there than in the library of the Society. A catalogue of them has been published by the India Office.

In 1921 a copy of the Hebrew Scriptures, dated 1418, and written on vellum, was lent to the Trustees of the British Museum, where it is now on exhibition.

The history of the library is one of steady growth. Further notable donations to it were in the eighteenth century from Francis Aston, Fellow, and in the nineteenth from Henry Dircks, Fellow, and from H. B. Brady, Fellow, the last-named providing a fund for purchase of books in Protozoology. Donations from Fellows have been prominent in assisting the library, and not least in the form of presentation copies from authors. Thus, on our shelves we have a first-edition copy of the *Origin of the Species*, inscribed ‘From the Author.’

**SERIAL PUBLICATIONS**

Serial publications, as is usual with libraries of science, form the largest section of the library. That class of publication to-day constitutes the bulkiest contribution to current science. A distinctive feature of it in the Society’s library is the very extensive representation of publications of ‘learned Societies, Academies, and similar institutions’ from practically all over the world. In many cases these have ‘long sets’ running from the date of the foundation of the Academy or Society onward. Owing to rearrangements in Europe after the War very considerable modifications of these issues, amounting in some cases to change of name and even of language, have taken place. These changes the Society’s library intake reflects fully, and has duly kept
pace with. Taken in their entirety, with long series running back into previous centuries, catholic representation, and adequacy of adjustment to recent changes, the Society’s collection of this class of scientific literature is, it seems, of a degree of completeness unique among the scientific libraries of Europe to-day. The collection of this kind most nearly approaching it would seem to be in Rome, in the Accademia dei Lincei.

Among serial publications of science the library contains a limited number of the usual journals pertaining to special branches of Natural Science. The Society avoids in this respect making overlap with the numerous specialized libraries of science which are readily available elsewhere.

Under the heading ‘Tracts’ the library possesses more than twelve hundred bound volumes of scientific “tracts” and pamphlets. Included in these volumes are printed separate publications of a scientific character which date back in some instances to the earlier half of the sixteenth century.

A particular care of the library is the getting together of books bearing immediately on the history, internal and external, of the Society, both in the present and in the past. Contributing to this object are memoirs and personal records of the members of the Fellowship. The acquisition of such material is a desideratum, which, as the Library Committee would desire to remind Fellows, is a distinct need of the library and one which the Fellows themselves are likely to be best able to supply.

CATALOGUES

The Library is estimated to contain now 130,000 volumes. At various dates the library has been catalogued. The last printed catalogue was issued in 1882; that therefore is the catalogue now current. But within the library-room, a catalogue, of the card-index kind, is kept fully up-to-date, and is available there. It is arranged under ‘authors;’ it does not include the periodicals. A Catalogue of the Periodicals was issued in 1912. Since then, however, the intake of periodicals in respect to serials and journals dealing with the specialized science has, as mentioned above, been fundamentally revised. On the
other hand, the regular acquisition of serials, e.g. Proceedings, Transactions, issued by learned Societies, Scientific Academies, etc., has been maintained and extended, although the titles under which these are published have been in some cases altered. The items of the library's existing supply of periodicals of both classes are all listed in the World List of Scientific Periodicals, prepared under the auspices of the Society and issued in 1933. For periodicals current in 1901 or at any subsequent date down to 1933 inclusive, information as to whether they are in the Society's library is readily found by turning to the World List.¹

MANUSCRIPTS

The Society's library is rich in manuscripts. Among notable individual items the following may be mentioned: The MS of the first two books of Newton's Principia from which the original edition was printed, 1687. It has small corrections written on it, perhaps in Edmond Halley's hand. A volume of original correspondence and documents relating to the invention of the method of Fluxions. Six large volumes of Newtoniana, collected by the Rev. Charles Turner. The MSS of four works by Marcello Malpighi, with original drawings by him, and also a number of letters from him. A series of more than 300 letters written by Anthony Leeuwenhoek of Delft. A lengthy letter from Albert Dürer to his friend and patron Pirckheynmer. Letters from Henry Oldenburg and John Beale to Robert Boyle. A commonplace book containing draft letters from Oldenburg to Milton and Boyle. The Autograph of Wallis's Treatise on Logic. An album of letters written by Joseph Priestley, with portraits and other material relating to him collected by James Yates, F.R.S.

In the library there are four sets of 'guard-books.' The first set of these, consisting of 39 volumes, contains the MSS of papers communicated to the Society dating from before the granting of the Charter onward to 1741. This series, of about 2500 items, was catalogued by Sir Arthur Church, F.R.S., and a précis of the catalogue was printed privately and issued in 1907, under the title Some Account of the Classified Papers in the Archives with an Index of its Authors.

The second set of ‘guard-books’ covers the period 1741-1801. It contains memoirs and letters to the number of 3650, in 127 volumes. This also has been catalogued by Sir Arthur Church. The third and fourth sets follow, carrying the series onward from the beginning of last century. There are also a set of ‘letter-books’ containing fair copies of scientific letters addressed to the Society from its foundation down into the early part of the eighteenth century.

Other manuscripts in the library are the great collection of Boyle papers, in 53 volumes; the Sherard correspondence, being letters addressed to William Sherard, F.R.S. (1719), many years British Consul at Smyrna and founder of the Sherardian professorship of Botany at Oxford; the Boole MSS, being six cases of MS papers on Mathematics and Logic, by George Boole, F.R.S. (1857).

The library grew up in Gresham College, the Society’s first home. There, as early as 1663, Samuel Sorbière, ‘historiographe du Roy’ (Louis XIV.), when visiting the the Society to be admitted to the Fellowship, noticed ‘déjà un commencement de Bibliothèque.’ There, too, the library received the accession of the Arundel MSS and books in 1678, shortly before the demolition of Arundel House. In 1710 with the removal of the Society to Crane Court the library went thither, and thence into Somerset House, as the Society’s home shifted. The library reached its present apartments in 1873, on the Society’s occupying the east wing of Burlington House. The book-shelves extend to no fewer than sixty bookcases which are accommodated in several of the rooms on the ground floor, first floor and in part of the basement. The books of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries are to be placed together in dust-proof shelving in the Officers’ Room.

The library can be substantially assisted if the Fellows will bear in mind a wish formally expressed by the Society’s Council, that on the publication of a book by a Fellow a presentation copy from the author should, where possible, be forwarded for inclusion in the library.

C. S. S.