

EDUCATION SQUARE.

III.—The Public Library.

Magnificent Enterprise.

[By our Special Reporter.]

The finest ornament of "Education Square," on North terrace, when the design in progress shall have been completed by the erection of the central facade to accord with the completed western wing, and the nearly finished eastern portion, will be the splendid pile of buildings in which the Public Library and Museum are housed. This grand block—half of which is in occupation, and the walls of another wing nearly ready for the roof—will cost in the aggregate about £250,000. The outlay mentioned is large, but the buildings are



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substantial and beautiful, eminently convenient for the purposes for which they were devised, and a credit to the draftsmanship of Mr. E. J. Woods, formerly Colonial Architect, from whose plans they were built, and to the present Superintendent of Public Buildings (Mr. C. E. Owen Smyth, I.S.O.). The present article deals solely with the Public Library, which now occupies the western wing.

—Founded in London in 1834.—

The first steps that have resulted after a long process in the establishment of the Public Library were taken in London on August 29, 1834, exactly a fortnight after the legislative establishment of the nascent province of South Australia. On that date the South Australian Literary and Scientific Association was founded, with Lieut.-Col. C. Napier as its President, and a committee of nine members. The specified object of the association was "the cultivation and diffusion of useful knowledge throughout the colony." The original minute book is still in possession of the



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Board of Governors of the Public Library, Museum, and Art Gallery. It contains a "form of obligation" signed by the first members. Among the signatures are those of Robert Gouger, G. S. Kingston, D. Wakefield, Rowland Hill, Governor Hindmarsh, R. R. Torrens, Edward and Samuel Stephens, and B. T. Finnis. The library selected by the association for transmission to South Australia consisted of 82 works (117 vols.), mostly on the Australasian, Polynesian, and American colonies, and statistical handbooks relating to Great Britain. They were packed in an iron chest, which contained also the charter of the Constitution of the new province, and were shipped to Australia by the ship *Tam O'Shanter*. After their arrival in Adelaide a mechanics' institute was formed, which held its meetings in a wooden shanty about 12 ft. square, on the park lands, on a part of the site now occupied by the railway station. Lectures were given to "crowded audiences" in this building. The financial collapse in Governor Gawler's time, however, nearly wrecked the Institute. In September, 1844, an independent organization—the South Australian Sub-

scription Library—was formed on a more exclusive basis; but three years later its 117 subscribers had dwindled to 32, and even a reduction of the subscription from 42/ to 21/ failed to secure sufficient support to keep it going. Therefore the two weakened bodies amalgamated in May, 1848, and were assisted to a greater display of vigour by two donations of £100 from Mr. J. B. Graham, and Mr. John Ridley (inventor of the Ridley stripper). The Circulating Library was formed as the result of the amalgamation. The Institute Library was removed to a room in Peacock's Buildings, Hindley street, and a few months later to the Old Exchange Chambers, King William street (where a reading room was also opened). Five years more saw affairs in a muddle and the books dilapidated.

—South Australian Institute Founded.—

In September, 1854, Mr. Fenn moved in Parliament for a Bill to establish a national institute, and said that during the previous four years the Library and Institute had received only £29, which had been available for purchase of books; and that, but for

the liberality of the Government, there would have been a complete failure. The "liberality" referred to was a vote in 1852 of £700 for books. Mr. Fenn added that the total value of the volumes in the Library at that date was £1,600, and the income of the Institute £360. A select committee was appointed, and it recommended the formation of a national institute under the style of "The South Australian Institute." A Bill to give effect to this was passed on May 27, 1856. This placed the Institute under the control of a board of six governors—three appointed by the Governor and three by the incorporated societies; and His Excellency ordered that not less than £500 yearly should be put on the Estimates for current expenses. About this time the Medical Society of Adelaide, formed in the early days, dissolved, and handed its property to the Institute. In 1859 the Philosophical Society, and shortly afterwards the Society of Arts, were incorporated with the Institute. The first permanent home of the then vigorous organization was opened on January 29, 1861, by Governor Sir R. G. MacDonnell. Although that edifice—still known as "The

Institute, North Terrace"—has been superseded for some of its purposes by later erections, it is still in use, as a circulating library (under the direction of a vigorous committee) and reading room; and modern additions have made it an ideal home also for the associated societies, and the newly-purchased York Gate Library. The old building cost £6,500 to erect, and the recent additions £6,200. The latter followed the simple but decorative lines of the original design by the late Mr. Edward Hamilton, and the stuccoed facades look quite handsome in their fresh dress of paint.

—The Present Public Library.—

The present Public Library forms the western wing of a noble series of structures designed by the late Mr. E. J. Woods to surround an open quadrangle. The early legislators of the State seem to have had a passion for laying foundations without troubling to rear any superstructure upon them. Old residents of Adelaide will remember that before the present House of Assembly was erected it was necessary to

blast away with dynamite foundations laid down many years before for a Parliament House of half the dimensions of the present scheme. Even more than this had to be done in connection with the Public Library Building, for two substructures of masonry were removed. The first instalment of £1,000 for a commodious building had been voted in 1867; but, on account of the commercial panic of 1867, and red rust in the crops for several years, nothing further was done until 1873, when £3,000 was put on the Estimates for the west wing. A foundation was laid, and the unusual course was taken of advertising for designs to conform to it! After the report of the Institute Commission in 1876 these foundations, being deemed unsuitable, were taken up, and new were put down. Tenders were twice advertised for to complete the building, without satisfactory offers being received. When the structure as it now stands was decided upon, it was found necessary to take up and relay the substructure put down in 1876. The accompanying picture of the Public Library building conveys a better idea than any verbal description could give; but it may

be mentioned that the main hall is 120 x 40 ft. long, and has two galleries running all around it, and a crypt of equal extent with that of the hall itself. The ground floor and lower gallery are divided into convenient bays for general works and magazines and periodical literature, and the uppermost gallery is occupied chiefly with newspaper shelves. From the inception of the Library the open access system has been the rule, any member of the public being free to take any book he may choose from the shelves and read it in the building. There is, however, a section devoted to rare works of great value, to pamphlets and brochures, which might easily be displaced and disarranged, and to the works to which access can be obtained only on application to the Library staff.

—The New Name.—

The foundation stone of the building was laid by the then Governor (Sir W. F. D. Jervois), on November 7, 1879, and His Excellency on that occasion suggested that the name of the institution should be altered from the "South Australian Insti-

tute" to "the Public Library, Museum, and Art Gallery," the title which it has since borne. The opening ceremony was performed in December, 1884, by Sir W. C. F. Robinson, then Governor. Its subsequent career—first under the direction of the late Mr. Robert Kay, as General Director and Secretary, and (since Mr. Kay's retirement, about five years ago) by Mr. J. R. G. Adams, latterly as General Secretary, has been one of remarkable development. The progress was hastened by the munificent Dr. Morgan Thomas's bequest of £64,000 a few years ago to the triple institutions under the control of the Board of Governors, of which one-half was allotted to the Library. The corpus of that half has been kept intact, and the interest has enabled the board to buy a number of valuable sets which it would have been impossible to procure out of the ordinary Government grant. The Library to-day contains about 73,000 volumes, and since the Morgan Thomas bequest it has increased at the rate of about 4,000 volumes yearly, which may be regarded as its future normal rate of extension. The works in Library have cost (irrespective of