RAILROAD TRAVELING LIBRARIES.*

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Long before the state of New York had taken up the traveling library some of our American railroad companies were circulating books to the employees along their lines. The earliest railroad traveling library, that of the Boston and Albany Railroad Company, was opened in Boston free to all employees of the company in February, 1869, and was moved to the general office of the company at Springfield, Mass, its present location, about 1881. The library now numbers about 3,000 volumes, all of which are for circulation except 500 reference books. Its annual circulation is about 3,000. It has received numerous donations of money and books but it is chiefly supported by appropriations from the company. Its government is vested in a committee of five; two members of the board of directors, the clerk of the Boston & Albany Railroad Company, the assistant superintendent, and the master mechanic. Orders for books are answered every Wednesday, and each borrower may draw two books at a time. Books may be retained two weeks and may be renewed; otherwise they are subject to a fine of one cent a day.

The library of the Railroad Branch of the Young Men’s Christian Association of New York city was founded in 1887, by Mr. Cornelius Vanderbilt. It is intended for the use of members of the association on the railroad lines terminating at the Grand Central station in New York. Employees of leased lines and affiliated companies, such as the express, and the railway mail service are admitted to membership. To accommodate the men belonging to the association at points along the line of the different roads, books are sent to these associations by train service without expense to the library. The men wishing to draw books for themselves or their families fill out a requisition blank, giving names and numbers of books desired. This blank is then countersigned by the secretary of the local association, and is then forwarded to the library in New York. From one to twenty books are sent in a single package. When ten or twenty

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books are sent in one lot, a small telescopic valise is used, instead of wrapping books in paper as is otherwise done. The books are all charged to the association to which sent. Then the secretary makes the personal charges and assumes the responsibility for the books. Books are allowed to stay out two weeks but may be renewed. Employees at stations where there is no railroad Young Men's Christian Association are allowed a "special library membership" in the New York association for one dollar per year, and books are sent directly to such members. Printed catalogs are given to all members. From a thousand to twelve hundred volumes are drawn each month. There are about eight thousand volumes in the library, of which one-third are fiction. The wives of the members make excellent use of the books on domestic economy and the children draw books by the various authors of juvenile works.

The Baltimore and Ohio Railroad Company established a free traveling library system for its employes in 1884. The kindly spirit which prompted it may be best shown by an extract from a circular letter addressed to employes at the time of the library's inauguration:

"The establishment of a Free Circulating Library for the employes of the company is undertaken in the belief that such an institution will be welcomed by all classes as a popular and desirable measure, and that, through its agency and development, much-needed opportunity will be afforded employes to qualify themselves for promotion and advancement in life, while at the same time their children, wherever located, will have at hand facilities for study and instructive reading matter seldom obtainable outside large cities. This will be done without cost to employes and in such a manner that the books furnished can be utilized not only at reading-rooms (not always convenient of access), but also amid the comforts and society of their homes. . . .

"This library is therefore to be exclusively for the use of all employes, their wives, and more particularly, their children. Its mission will be to exert an elevating and educating influence on those it reaches. It will supply current periodicals, standard works on the sciences, general literature, poetry, historical, text, and other books of practical utility to engineers, mechanics, firemen, and other railroad employes, and those especially adapted to educating and forming the character of the young. . . .

"It has been created and will be sustained by voluntary contributions of money and literature from the officers and employes of the Baltimore and Ohio Company and outside friends interested in their welfare."

The library began its work with 4,500 volumes on its shelves, 3,000 of which had been purchased. The first year 16,120 volumes were circulated. In 1896, 2,500 borrowers drew 39,505 volumes from the library. Since 1885 more than 300,000 volumes have been drawn.

"Corporations, like individuals, are recognizing that their duty to those they employ is not complete on the payment of the stipulated wage. Hence it is that relief departments and other helpful organizations are established or encouraged by so many of our railroads. These organizations raise men to a higher physical intellectual and moral plane of life — the very fundamentals of faithful service."