

The Library's Place in the World

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DELIVERED ON THE OCCASION OF THE OPENING OF THE NEW
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THE PUBLIC LIBRARY, TORONTO, CANADA

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*An address upon the place of libraries in our efforts to develop intelligent citizens, by
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IT is a pleasure to bring to you today the greetings and the felicitations of the American Library Association, for librarians everywhere have been looking forward to this great occasion and are rejoicing with you in this addition to the educational institutions of Toronto. The noble building that we now dedicate reflects not only the wealth of your city, but still more the fine quality of your citizens. You have created a new and splendid and imposing house for books and bookish people, a thing of beauty, and a great instrument of civilization.

Like all other institutions, the public library of our time is both old and new. There have always been libraries, back to the beginnings of recorded history. Prehistoric man transmitted knowledge to the young of the race by word of mouth just as our contemporary ancestors do, but wherever you find anything that can be called a civilization you find schools and books and libraries. Hundreds of thousands of clay tablets have been dug up in Mesopotamia, some of them going back two thousand years before Christ. When Layard in 1850 excavated the palace of Assurbanipal, King of Nineveh, he found a library of ten thousand distinct works, which appear to have been methodically arranged and catalogued, the figure of the god Dagon being at the entrance to show that the library was under the protection of the Deity as well as of the king. Two thousand years before Christ there were in Egypt collections of papyrus rolls of such importance that high officials were appointed to care for them. Rameses II, who lived from 1324 to 1258 B.C., built a library with the inscription "The Hospital of the Soul" over the door, and near it was an effigy of the goddess of libraries. After Greek ideas and institutions spread to Egypt under the Ptolomies (323-30 B.C.) the library at Alexandria was so large that it is said to have had 700,000 pieces, furnishing to the Mahometan conqueror in A.D. 640, fuel sufficient for 4,000 public baths for a period of six months. Making what allowance you will for legend and exaggeration, there is no doubt that the library at Alexandria was a very fine one. The Greek libraries were plundered by the Romans, who took many manuscripts to Rome as spoils. On the other hand Hadrian in the second century A.D. founded a splendid library at the University of Athens. Julius Caesar had seen public libraries in the important literary centres in Asia Minor, Egypt and Greece, and appointed Varro to organize a library of universal literature, but before the idea could be carried out Caesar was assassinated and Varro proscribed. Augustus, however, carried out Caesar's purpose, and Pliny tells us that Asinius Pollio, the librarian, not only inaugurated such a library, but was the first to introduce the fashion of decorating libraries with busts of departed authors. In the fourth

century of the Empire at least twenty-eight public libraries flourished in Rome, according to early lists, and nine can still be identified in name and seven in location. Rome established libraries also in some of the chief provincial cities, with the condition in some cases that the locality should grant an annual sum for the care of the library. Many of the synagogues in New Testament times had libraries owned by the community, and the Saracens established libraries throughout their Western caliphates. In the Middle Ages the monasteries preserved learning and literature during the long centuries of barbarian aggression, and copied books for exchange as well as for their own use. I was myself born near Jarrow and Wearmouth, the home of the Ven. Bede, both monastic houses having large libraries. The monastery at Novalesse in Italy had 6,500 volumes when it was destroyed by the Saracens, in the tenth century, and a monk of the twelfth century wrote that "a monastery without a library is like a castle without an armory". The students at universities in the middle ages usually copied or rented the books they needed, but books were often bequeathed to colleges for loan or consultation. In 1338 the Sorbonne had 1,722 volumes, many of them still to be seen in the Bibliothèque Nationale, while many colleges at Oxford still have codices which came to them in the middle ages. There are thousands of manuscripts in the libraries of Europe that have never been printed, or even described, and a library of such material is not only useless but often incomprehensible to one who is not engaged in research. Dr. Bostwick, librarian of the St. Louis Public Library, tells in the *Library Journal* for April 15th last of one such research worker. Bostwick was at the International Library Conference at Rome last June, and called upon Cardinal Ehrle, the Prefect of the Vatican Library. I was with him when he called. Bostwick describes the visit:

"I had the pleasure of a call, when in Rome, on one of the foremost medieval scholars in the Roman church—Cardinal Ehrle, who is engaged in studies for a comprehensive history of medieval philosophy. He told me that for his purposes the valuable part of a library consisted solely of its manuscripts. The work of the medieval philosophers was rarely printed, and then not the best of it. There are 100,000 manuscripts in the Bibliothèque Nationale at Paris, 70,000 in the Vatican library, and so on. The printed books might all be destroyed for any effect that they would have on his work. Not one of our thousands of libraries in the United States would be of the slightest use to him."

When printing came into use books cost less, but otherwise libraries remained much the same in their function and methods. The beginning of Yale is to a librarian one of the most fortunate of its traditions, for the college did not begin by appointing a rector or teachers or by getting students, but by getting books. "I give these books", said each of the founders in 1701, "to found a college in this colony". Yale has lived up to the tradition of its founding, for the library is its largest and finest and costliest building. Here in Canada you have a similar instance at the University of British Columbia, where the first building put up was the library.

The chief factor in the modern development of libraries was the triumph of democracy, with the consequent development of a sense of public responsibility

for universal education. So long as most of the people were illiterate, books and libraries were of no direct service to them, but so soon as they learned to read they demanded books. It is very difficult for us to realize that in the childhood of persons now living most people could not read or write, that sixty percent of the present population of the world over ten years of age have never learned to read, and that in large parts of Africa, Asia, and the Pacific Islands illiteracy is almost absolute. Even in English speaking countries the ability to read and write is a recent development and is still far from universal. In England the test of illiteracy is the signing of the marriage register with a mark instead of a name. In 1841-45 the percentage of men who signed with a mark was 32.6, while that of women was 48.9. In 1924 there were still 995 men and 1,041 women in England who signed the register with a mark. It is unnecessary to point out that a person might be able to write his name and still be illiterate in the wider sense. The United States census of 1920 showed that six percent of the males over ten years of age, and 5.9 of the females, could not read or write; and while this high percentage was due chiefly to the negroes and to foreign born whites it was nevertheless true that three per cent. of the illiterates were native whites. In Canada in 1921, the percentage of all persons of ten years and over not knowing how to read was 5.1 per cent., the number including 80,037 Indians, of whom 52 per cent. were illiterate; if the United States standard of inability to write is applied the percentage is 5.7. During the late World War the United States army called a soldier illiterate if he was unable to read a newspaper and write a letter home, and of a million and a half recruits examined, 24.9 per cent. were classed as illiterate, of whom 14.2 per cent. were negroes. The illiteracy among arriving immigrants decreased from 23.5 per cent. in 1900-09 to 0.9 per cent. in 1926, due to new immigration laws.

The adoption of compulsory education not only gave the ability to read to millions whose parents belonged to the class of illiterates, but created a demand for free public libraries as well as for free public schools. "Change the system of education", said Leibnitz, "and you will change the face of the world". Books were no longer luxuries for the rich, and libraries were no longer collections to be used by a few scholars. No town could maintain a high rank unless it added to its schools and other institutions a well chosen library. Compulsory education in England dates only from 1870, but by that time almost every English child could read and write, and both schools and libraries were to be found all over the country, although as a rule neither was free. Next year we shall celebrate the organizing by Benjamin Franklin of the Philadelphia Library Company, the mother of all the subscription libraries in North America. Gradually these subscription libraries became free public libraries, although some, like the Boston Library or the Boston Athenaeum, still retain their private character. We can watch the development of the Lyceum lecture system, and the formation of Mechanics Institutes and of Library Associations on a popular basis, with fees so low as to seem to exclude no one, until the public took them over and maintained them by tax. We can see school district libraries begun and supported by taxation, many of them open to adults as well as to children. We see privately established libraries like Astor, Lenox, Tilden, Peabody, made absolutely free by endowment. We see, finally,

the public library provided and maintained entirely by public taxation, although many such libraries have also been the beneficiaries of gifts and bequests. It was natural that public libraries should come in the cities first, because of the greater wealth in a small area, and come more quickly in thickly settled areas than in those sparsely inhabited. New York State, for example, has five hundred libraries with fifteen million volumes in them, yet in New York State there are more than a million and a half persons living on farms and in rural communities who are without any sort of library service.

Of course not everyone who *can* read *does* read, and not everyone who reads, reads wisely. Ramsay MacDonald once said that British schools "are sending out millions of people whose capacity to read makes them the prey of the most worthless and mentally devastating printed matter". On the other hand many able boys and girls now obtain an education who would have found it difficult or practically impossible in earlier days. Millions of them go through the secondary schools and many go on to the colleges and universities. In the United States there are at present enrolled about a million college students, and within the next decade there may easily be a million and a half. Yale deliberately restricts the number of its students, but in doing so admits year by year an increasing number of boys who have little money but have the promise of intellectual achievement. Last year one fourth of all Yale students were self-supporting in whole or in part. There were 1,209 students who received scholarships, fellowships, or loans, amounting to half a million dollars; while 1,246 different students earned during term time, from work obtained through an official Yale bureau, more than a quarter of a million dollars. College students form but a relatively small part of the population, but the impulse that carries so many of them to college turns millions of others into educated men and women. Chancellor Brown of New York University recently defined the educated man as one who is making good and continuous progress in his interminable education. He may never have gone to college, said the chancellor, yet may be an educated man; or he may have gone, and not be one. Ramsay MacDonald defined an educated man as "one with certain subtle spiritual qualities which make him calm in adversity, happy when alone, just in his dealings, rational and sane in the fullest meaning of that word, in all the affairs of life." MacDonald himself never went to college, but many colleges have been proud to confer degrees upon him.

The same intellectual ambitions and desires that are evidenced at this side of the water are active in Britain also. Stanley Baldwin, recently conservative prime minister, gave an address to the students of the University of Glasgow on January 20th last on the occasion of his installation as Rector, and his address might almost have been made by his son Oliver, the Socialist member of Parliament. Mr. Baldwin spoke of the war and of the new world that is the result. He asked in what the newness consists, and answered that for Britain at least it is the advent of democracy. "At home the advent of democracy is the most pregnant change, affecting our government internally and externally, and altering profoundly for good or ill our outlook in every direction. I have no desire to discuss democracy as a political system: to the student and historian it is a subject of profound interest:

to the specialist in the theory of constitutional history a fascinating subject to play with. But to the statesman it is a fact: it is the tool with which he has to work: it is the environment in conformity with which he has to act. No matter to him whether the system be ideal or not, whether it be the best adapted to his task, it is for him to labour unceasingly to make men understand the words which are for ever on their lips: to give them faith in themselves and to warn them of the infinite patience and understanding which will be needed in the practical application of their creed.

"The task of democracy is hard enough in these little islands, but upon its success or failure hangs the fortune of half the world, nay more, of the world itself. Economically we have travelled far from the complacency of pre-war days. Complacency, rightly or wrongly considered to be a characteristic of the Victorian age, perished with much else in the war, and gave place to introspection and self-questioning, doubts and fears, only too natural when the appalling tension of four years was suddenly relaxed."

"On the other hand", he continues, "there has in my view been a quickening of the people. Never has there been such a real and general desire for knowledge, and the quest for learning, for so long a glorious characteristic of your race, has sprung up south of the border and is even now no less widespread south of the border than it has been to the north."

This intellectual ferment is making new and larger demands upon our public libraries, and is developing and moulding them to larger and wider usefulness. The libraries are keenly aware of the change and of the possibilities involved in it, and are guiding and interpreting the demands as never before. Dr. Bostwick says that public libraries are closer to the people than they used to be, closer in the United States and Canada and Britain than in the rest of the world. Indeed, after telling about Cardinal Ehrle and his interest in manuscripts Dr. Bostwick comments as follows:

"We need not depreciate the great value of studies such as this, nor the necessity of great collections of source material to support them. But when we realize that the great body of foreign librarians are of this type, that they have never heard of the kind of library work that we are doing in this country and having heard of it are not in the slightest degree interested in it, it is time, I think, to consider soberly whether, after all, what we are doing is important, and, if so, what we can do to secure its recognition throughout the world as important."

He then proceeds to enumerate the principal things to be found in the American Public Library, introduced within the past half century and not generally found in libraries elsewhere: 1. The open shelf; 2. Home use of books; 3. Treatment of replaceable material as temporary; 4. Regarding the reader as well as the book as a library unit; 5. Keeping books in physical condition for hard usage; 6. Expansion of service, intensive and extensive; 7. Community use of branch buildings for various purposes; 8. Modernization of catalogues, lists and printed bulletins; 9. The cutting of red tape; increase of accessibility; 10. Service to groups; 11. Purchase of books with reference to community wants and needs, without undue delay; 12. Well-considered publicity; 13. Special aid to business and industry; 14. Special

training for workers; 15. Their organization for mutual information and aid; 16. Adult education: the "Readers' Adviser"; 17. Operation and support as a public body.

Fourteen years ago Mr. John Cotton Dana of the Newark Public Library summarized the matter with less detail and with less seriousness:

"For twenty-five years I have devoted myself quite persistently to promoting the habits of reading, of using libraries, and of book buying. This work has been very fascinating. One of its most attractive features has been its constant change in method, in scope and in material. I have seen that fundamental thing in library management, the relation of the taxpayer to his public library, change from the method of rigid supervision in 1894, in which year only four of a national gathering of about 125 librarians voted for the open shelf, to that of today, when almost every library of note eagerly invites its visitors to handle its books. In these same twenty-five years librarians have given up the age-limit method which kept children out of libraries, for the attraction method which lures them in. In 1890 libraries quite definitely pursued repose; today they seek results. In 1890 a citizen who wished to take home a library book was inspected for maturity, integrity and sweet reasonableness, and was guaranteed to possess these attributes by a fellow citizen of good repute for the same, before his wish was granted. Today an entry in a city directory is ample evidence that one possesses proper book-borrowing qualities; and a library's eagerness to serve often supplies a directory's deficiencies."

I quote from Mr. Bostwick and Mr. Dana, both outstanding librarians in the States, not only because they sum up admirably the characteristics of the most progressive public libraries south of your boundary, but because they are equally true of the Public Library of Toronto.

So we come back to the Toronto Public Library, with its half million volumes; its circulation of two and a half millions, its unique Boys and Girls House, its sympathetic and active Board of Management, its talented librarian, its loyal and capable staff. Dr. Locke said recently that this group of buildings is "one of the great educational plants of the Dominion, equipped to furnish education—inspirational, vocational, and recreational—to all who desire it." We librarians know that this is true, but does everyone in Toronto know it? To provide opportunity does not compel action. Built with the people's money, owned by the people, directed by forward-looking trustees, staffed with educated and trained men and women eager to give service, there is no limit to its intellectual and social possibilities. I ask the help of all in the city in making this library what it may become—leaders in the churches, teachers, journalists, lawyers, medical men, business men, workmen, parents—all who have the welfare of Toronto at heart. Here one learns to adjust himself to his environment; to arm himself against ignorance and inefficiency; to be tolerant of the ideals and points of view of others; to live more abundantly. "A library makes three gifts", said President Faunce of Brown University in 1906, "the gift of knowledge, the gift of perspective, the gift of ideals." He who understands facts, relations, and values is an educated man.

To you who have brought this new building into being Toronto owes a debt of gratitude. I will say with Cicero: You have planted a tree, of which other generations shall gather the fruit.