

THE LIBRARY

IN an admirable preface to the Library Series of which he is the Editor, Dr. Richard Garnett thus characterizes the present age:—"To call it *the* Age of Light were presumptuous, but *an* Age of Light it assuredly is, and, did we seek for a name, we should be inclined to entitle it the Age of Books. Not merely that there never before were so many books in the world, or that there never was a time when books and newspapers were so widely read or so influential, but that there never before was so much interest and curiosity respecting the makers of books, authors—the emitters of books, publishers—or the custodians of books, librarians. This curiosity, frequently frivolous and annoying, bears testimony, at all events, to the place which literature has taken, not merely in fact, but in general apprehension, among the agencies which mould the world. She always has had this place in effect ever since hieroglyphical writing passed into alphabetical, but the man of the world has been singularly unconscious of the agency by which its course was in large measure determined. Alexander has been conspicuous, Aristotle has been overlooked. Now the attention paid to authorship in all its forms shows that mankind has become aware that its destinies may be much affected by what some unknown young man is at the present moment scribbling in a garret. Those who have especially interested themselves in education, among whom librarians are to be reckoned, may justly regard this general perception as a proof that their efforts have not been in vain. . . . It is clear that the schoolmaster has been abroad to some purpose, and that one of the results of his mission has been the awakening of an intelligent interest, not merely in the producers and distributors of books, but in the history, the commercial value, the external semblance, and the fitting treatment of the volumes themselves."

Yet until within comparatively few years, throughout the English-speaking world, at least, the repositories of these books—the libraries—remained, as they had always been till then, the special possession of a small and privileged class. Even after the responsibility of a community for the education of the masses had been both recognized and, in large measure, acted upon, the logical sequence of such a course was not readily perceived. Finally, here and there, an individual began to ask, "Of what avail is teaching people to read unless you give them books after they can make use of them?" This and similar questions were the prelude to the entrance upon the scene of the modern free public library, devoted to general reading and the circulation of books, "the school of the grown-up," as it is aptly termed by Sir John Lubbock; while the equally important libraries of deposit and research, the modern "reference" libraries,