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A PLEA FOR A NATIONAL LIBRARY

“IT is a fact, pregnant with meaning, that the nations which possess the most extensive libraries maintain the foremost rank in civilization.” Canada enjoys the dubious distinction of ranking with Siam and Abyssinia in at least one respect,—none of the three possesses a national library. This wealthy, young nation, proud of the educational facilities it offers, lacks the very keystone of a really national system of education. Proud, too, of our intellectual heritage, we have forgotten that England and France possess the greatest national libraries that the world has ever seen. Here some one will surely object, for it is a popular delusion, that we have a national library in the Library of Parliament. But is the Library of Parliament a national library? Does it fulfil, or is it intended to fulfil, any of the functions of a national library? No one familiar with the work of the great national libraries of other lands can believe this. The Library of Parliament is a legislative library, pure and simple; it was created to serve the needs of parliament, not of the public. So absolutely is this the case that when some one raised the question in the House of Commons a few years ago, both the prime minister and the leader of the opposition declared that even the slight privileges then allowed to the public should be abolished, and the library preserved for the exclusive use of parliament. Recognizing the purely legislative character of the Library of Parliament, there is nothing to criticize in the attitude taken by the leaders.

On the other hand, if this were in any real sense a national library, one could not too severely condemn such a position. As it stands, the discussion really has helped to pave the way towards a movement for a national library,