

the British Empire, Western Europe and the United States, are supplied with these free fountains of knowledge. You say there is a great deal in those libraries that is not worth reading, or perhaps, that the most of what is read is light reading. Undoubtedly there are thousands of volumes that a busy man could not read with much profit, and undoubtedly there are thousands of volumes of light and ephemeral literature, but is it not infinitely better that the individual should read light literature than that he should not read at all? In that light literature he may stumble across a thought or an ideal, several degrees higher than his own, and, acting on that, he will be a gainer. But the great proportion of literature in the public libraries is not useless, but full of good and elevating thought. Who can calculate the improvement in morality, intelligence and taste, arising from a free dissemination of the best thoughts of the world's thinkers?

Since the earliest historic times men have made collections of their recorded deeds, observations and thoughts. In the ruins of Nineveh, Assyrian explorers have discovered great collections of tablets inscribed with the hieroglyphic writings of the ancient Persian people. Egyptian archæologists claim to have discovered evidences of collections of writings among the ancient Egyptians. It is well known that the greatest library of ancient times was gathered together at Alexandria. This library was several times partially destroyed by fire, and as often partially restored, but was finally wiped out of existence when the Saracens captured the city. Greece and Rome were not behindhand in gathering the recorded knowledge of the world into libraries, some of which were thrown open for the use of the public. The Romans were an extremely warlike and practical people, and consequently had little time to devote to letters, so that their first libraries consisted of books brought home after Asiatic conquests. The Emperors interested themselves in literature, the example being set by Augustus, who undertook to found a library in which were placed many copies of works from the great Alexandrian library.

During the Middle Ages the monasteries were the refuge of letters. There the writing, and transcribing and embellishment of books, were counted part of the regular work of the monks, and it was chiefly at the monasteries that any great numbers of books were kept. Towards the close of the Middle Ages, the universities also assisted in this work, and made collections of books. Some of the rulers of those troubled times also took a deep interest in assisting the intellectual life of their times—notably, Alfred the Great, Charlemagne, William the Conqueror and Edward the Third, and consequently were careful to collect and preserve the books of this period.

It is in modern time, however, that libraries have reached their greatest development. Among the largest libraries of the world are the British Museum, with its 1,550,000 volumes and 50,000 manuscripts; the Bibliotheque Nationale, of Paris, with 1,827,000 books; the Vatican library at Rome, with 220,000 printed books and 25,600 manuscripts; the Imperial Public Library, of St. Petersburg, with 1,000,000 printed volumes, and the Congressional Library, of Washington, with 396,000 volumes and 130,000 pamphlets.

The natural inference from the preceding historical matter is that libraries and intellectual life go hand in hand, stimulating each other. How important it is then that the benefits of libraries should be extended to as many people as possible. In order to extend these benefits an interest in reading must be