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A PUBLIC LIBRARIES ACT.

Notice has been given of an intention to apply to Parliament for an Act, under which a free Public Library may be established in this city. The subject was brought before the public some months ago, in a lecture delivered at the Rooms of the Natural History Society, by Mr. F. W. Torrance, and has since been agitated by a portion of the daily press. The proposed Bill will probably be based on the Public Libraries Act of Great Britain and American legislation on the same subject. Divided as the community is in religious creed, it has been deemed advisable to restrict the present application to the non-Catholic section, and the main object of the Act is, we understand, to authorize the non-Catholic portion of our citizens to impose a trifling rate on themselves for the support of the Library; leaving their fellow-citizens of the Catholic faith at liberty to establish a similar Library for themselves, to be sustained in the same way, if they should think proper to do so. It is, doubtless, matter for regret that any partition wall should be built up between the books provided for the use of one and the other section; but, at the present time, it seems the easiest way to avoid difficulties which would otherwise have to be encountered; and, fortunately, the city is wealthy and populous enough to bear without inconvenience the cost of two libraries. Pending the discussion which will probably take place on this Bill in Parliament, and the objections which will doubtless be raised, it may be instructive to glance at what has been done towards the establishment of Public Libraries elsewhere.

Reverting to ancient times, we need hardly remind the reader of the existence of vast libraries of costly parchments, when printing was unknown, and books were multiplied only by the laborious art of the penman. What lover of ancient lore has not sorrowed over the destruction by Omar of the noble

collection of parchments at Alexandria, a library which fed the baths of that city with precious fuel for six months! In modern times, circulating libraries have been in use for more than a century, the most stupendous being that of Mudie, in London, which is said to buy over 200,000 volumes every year, and to take from 50 to 200 copies of every new work.

But it was not till 1850, that the first Public Libraries Act was passed in England. By this Act, we believe, it was necessary that a majority of the burgesses should poll their votes in favour of the introduction of the measure, before it could be enforced,—somewhat like Mr. Dunkin's Temperance Act in this Province. The rate to be levied was not to exceed a halfpenny in the £.; and, rather strange to say, the Corporation were not empowered to expend any of the money so levied in the purchase of books, but solely in procuring and keeping up the necessary buildings for the reception of the Library.

Manchester was the first of the great English towns to avail herself of the Act. She already possessed a free Library, the funds for which had been raised by voluntary subscriptions and donations, but she gladly availed herself of the permission to levy a rate, granted by the Act, as the firmest and surest basis for the permanent support of her Library. There were croakers in Manchester when the project was first started, yet only forty votes were polled in that great city against the introduction of the Libraries Act, while four thousand were cast in the affirmative! It is a significant fact that voluntary contributions to the Library were received from 22,000 of the operatives of Manchester,—“the metropolis of that Titanic industry, on the continued success of which England has deliberately pledged her station and authority among the nations of the world.” The inauguration of the Manchester Free Public Library took place in September, 1852, and at the public meetings held on that occasion, the people of Manchester were applauded for the noble example they had set, by Thackeray, Dickens, Bulwer, Charles Knight, R. Monckton