

whereof—in their respective positions—they must necessarily be occupied. The worth of such knowledge can scarcely be overrated; and this consideration alone should suffice to induce all well-wishers of Canada's advancement to favour the setting up of free public libraries in every possible direction.

But it is not merely on account of their practical utility that these institutions are desirable. Amusement and recreation are essential to humanity. A public library is not only helpful to the student and the brainworker in their graver pursuits, it should likewise supply the means of entertainment for all. My long experience as a literary caterer enables me to assert that no men enjoy a well written novel with keener relish and none derive more refreshment from its perusal than the hard-worked lawyer or politician, to whom such recreation is often as much a necessity as it is a gratification.

Moreover, by the judicious supply of a due proportion of fiction in every free library, you interest a larger section of the public in its support. You will thus enlist the ladies on your side, and will delight the young whilst you satisfy the old. Readers for mere pastime will probably constitute the majority everywhere; yet even amongst this class many may be weaned, by the attraction of entertaining books, from the gross but seductive pleasures of sensual indulgence.

There are very few public libraries in Europe or America that do not contain a considerable number of novels. From an estimate carefully prepared some years ago, I assume that our library of Parliament has a much smaller proportion of light reading than any corresponding collection on either continent, with two or three exceptions. But on referring to the statistics of the Manchester free library—which is perhaps the best selected, if not altogether the largest of the kind in Great Britain—the proportion of fiction to other works *read* in the library is about one-third, so that for every book of mere amusement perused in that institution two works of solid instruction are consulted. But, in addition, books are loaned to outside readers. To such the proportion of fiction distributed is greater. It includes five-eighths of the entire circulation of the year.

The average circulation of books in and out of the library of Parliament, for three years in succession, affords us very similar results. Of books read in the library, or consulted during session, fully two-thirds are of a solid useful description, whilst of those loaned to the general public, out of session, probably five-eighths are works of imagination.

The annual additions to the library of Parliament in the shape of fiction are few and not costly. We possess a large though not a complete collection of the standard British novelists. These books could scarcely be omitted from any free library, for the reasons already stated. But, on the other hand, the guardians of such institutions, in the selection of books, should be careful to exclude from their shelves all works which have a tendency either to subvert the public morals or to encourage the spread of infidelity. They should be alive to the great responsibility of placing within indiscriminate reach books which are calculated to undermine morality or religion. If individuals insist on perusing such works, let it not be at the public expense, or in depositories accessible to the public generally.

Upon the opening of the Manchester free library in September, 1852, many persons of distinction in literature assembled to do honour to the occasion. Amongst the number was Charles Dickens. Called upon for a speech, he said, with his customary felicity,