

often, I think, we enjoy them more than their actual possessors; but I have never heard of a case, nor do I believe a case exists, in which one book collector thoroughly enjoys the collection of another book collector. If he does derive satisfaction from it, I think it is rather because he comes to contemplate the possibility that his friend may die, or be ruined, and that his collection may come to the hammer, and that he may become the possessor of one or two of these coveted treasures. But, putting aside the special taste for rare books, I think libraries like the one in which I am now speaking may appeal to the tastes of the whole community. They are not limited, and ought not to be limited, to a few. One advantage of education, at all events, is that every man, woman and child in the country ought to be able to read, and, to anybody who can read, there are open treasures of enjoyment and satisfaction which probably no other source of pleasure, be it artistic, be it anything else you please, is able to confer. A great French writer once stated that he had never in his life undergone any personal trouble or affliction the thought of which he could not dissipate by half an hour's reading. I cannot promise the inhabitants of Hertford that their griefs and troubles will, as doctors say, so quickly yield to treatment as that; and I entertain a suspicion that the French author I have alluded to either exaggerated in the passage, or else that his troubles were far lighter than those which ordinarily fall to the lot of humanity. Nevertheless, make what allowance we please for his opinion, the truth still remains, and will be testified to by every man who has acquired a taste for reading, that no more sovereign specific exists for dissipating the petty cares and troubles of life. And if we acquire—and recollect it is not an art of itself easy

to acquire—but if we once acquire a universal curiosity into the history of mankind, into the constitution of the material universe in which we live, into the various phases of human activity, and into the thoughts and beliefs by which men now long dead have been actuated in the past—if we once acquire this general and universal curiosity, we shall possess, I will not say, a specific against sorrow, but certainly a specific against boredom. We obtain a power to put our own small troubles and our own small cares in their proper place. We are able to see the history of mankind in something like its true perspective. We not only gain the power of diverting our thoughts from the small annoyances of the hour, but we gain further the inestimable gift of seeing how small, compared with the general sum of human interests, of human sufferings, and human joys, are the insignificant troubles which may happen to each one of us as individuals. There is no small advantage to be gained from the habit of reading. The habit of reading cannot be acquired by anybody who has not ready access to books, and ready access to many books, because the habit is of itself a habit of general curiosity, a habit of drawing your literary pleasure from no small or narrow source, a habit of spreading your interests over the whole interests which have ever influenced mankind so far as we can make ourselves acquainted with them; and therefore it is that the small collection of books which a poor man is able to acquire for himself is not enough to meet the needs of the case. Therefore it is that I hail with satisfaction the establishment in other towns of a free library like that which I see around us, and I could wish no better fortune for my old friends and constituents of Hertford than that they may one and all acquire that taste for literature and that habit of