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BOSTON PUBLIC LIBRARY.

THE NECESSITY OF FREE LIBRARIES IN CITIES AND TOWNS
IN CANADA.



We have received through the courtesy of A. M. Knapp, Esq., Assistant Librarian to the Public Library of Boston, the report of that valuable institution for 1878, which we have perused with the greatest interest. The boon of the library of this free institution, and the reading-room in connection with it, to the citizens of Boston, and to all strangers visiting that city, cannot be over estimated—in fact no greater proof can be adduced of the high estimation in which it is held, than the figures in the report

showing the great increase that is annually taking place in the circulation of its volumes, and the number who resort to it, particularly to the Bates Hall; men of science, scholars, students and authors come from distant parts to obtain reference to the valuable works to be found on its shelves.

The number of libraries in the United States, particularly in the New England portion, is a marked feature in the character of the people; a thirst after knowledge always marks a high state of civilization. In the New England States alone, there are upwards of 300 libraries—more than two-thirds of which are free to the public. Would that we could say as much for the whole Dominion of Canada, in which there is scarcely a single free library, if there is even one. The citizens of Boston hold, and justly so, in high regard the memory of those generous founders of their noble institutions, from which they now enjoy so much valuable knowledge and literary pleasure; indeed to such an extent have the books increased, that the present library is no longer capable of containing them, and enlarged and improved accommodation is now strongly recommended for early action by the city government. The total

number of volumes now contained in the Bates Hall and Lower Hall amount to 345,734, being an increase for the year of 33,724 or 12 per cent. The loans increased from a total in the previous year of 1,140,572, to 1,183,991, a gain of 43,419 volumes.

The reading rooms of the libraries were open to the public 357 days during the year, inclusive of Sundays, during which 371,693 readers were furnished with 471,984 periodicals, an increase of 32,179 readers and 47,320 periodicals, and these amounts, the report states would have been largely increased had the sitting accommodation in the central library been sufficient for the visitors. The record of books lost speaks most highly for the honour of the borrowers, only a volume missing in one department out of 11,723 issued. Among the five branch libraries connected with the same institution not one volume lost from an aggregate circulation of 275,654. In South Boston, but one out of 140,677. The gifts to the library during the year have been unusually large. By the public spirit of the Directors of the Mercantile Library Association, their library, which had been in the process of collection for 55 years, and containing 16,927 volumes, was presented to the Boston Free Library. Five hundred dollars was donated by a gentleman for the purpose of increasing the value of the mathematical collection. A special collection of 890 volumes, relating to history and biography, and embracing a great variety of valuable historical portraits, was presented by a lady; and another lady presented not only the whole of her valuable private library, but also the large sum of \$10,000—the interest to be expended for the purchase of books published previous to the year 1850; besides these gifts in one single year amounting to 18,935 volumes, the library was indebted to 674 givers for 2,271 volumes and 12,453 pamphlets. These figures are undoubted evidence of the public spirit of the citizens of Boston and of their intellectual character.

We quote the following words from the report of the Chairman of the Examining Committee, the Rev. Warren H. Cudworth, as aptly describing the Library Building, the character of the institution, its usefulness and growth:

“The first impression made upon the visitor by the Library is very favourable, and to the City of Boston extremely credit-