

longer any question of the ample returns made by a Free Public Library. It is absolutely necessary that the Library be free to all, as by experience it has been shown that a fee, ever so small, is a bar.

The necessity of Public Libraries to the life and progress of civilised communities is not a new idea. The earliest collections of which there is any record is in ancient Nineveh; chambers were discovered, the floors of which were covered to the depth of a foot with tablets of clay covered with cuneiform characters, in many cases so small as to require a magnifying glass. These tablets formed the library of Assurbani-pal, the greatest patron of literature amongst the Assyrians.

Of the libraries of ancient Greece we have very little record. At Cninelus there is said to have been a collection of works on medicine. Plato is known to have been a collector. The library of Aristotle was bequeathed by him to his disciple Theophrastus. It is said that Aristotle was the first person who collected a library, and that he communicated the taste for collecting to the Sovereigns of Egypt. At all events, it is certain that the libraries of Alexandria were the most important, as they were the most celebrated of the ancient world. Amongst the numerous projects entertained by Cæsar was that of presenting Rome with Public Libraries. It seems rather doubtful whether any steps were actually taken towards its execution; however, we find that Rome had more than one Public Library. The honor of founding the first Public Library is said by Pliny to have fallen to Pollio. This was followed by the Public Library founded by the Emperor Augustus. Altogether, in the fourth century there are said to have been twenty-seven Public Libraries in Rome, and that "It was one of the principal maxims of those who were most affected to the publique good to enrich many of those Libraries and to bequeath and destine them afterwards to the use of all the learned men."

The limits and purpose of this paper forbid further investigation into the history of the subject, but I must take a few minutes to trace briefly the growth of the Free Public Library of to-day. Neither the ancient nor the modern Englishman prior to this century had any conception of the Free Library as it exists in the principal cities of Great Britain, Canada and United States. Down to recent times libraries were usually collected by an individual, and by him devoted to the limited use of the select few, under certain restrictions. One of the earliest and most famous of modern libraries, the "Bodleian," was opened in 1602. When Selden's collection of 8,000 volumes was presented to this library the gift was accompanied by this condition, "that the said books may be, within the space of twelve months next ensuing, placed and chained." The custom of fastening books to their shelves by chains was common at an early period throughout Europe; even at the present day chained books maybe found in some of the parish churches in England,