

PUBLIC LIBRARIES AND THEIR USES.

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I. Introduction :-

1. Objects for which libraries were first founded.
2. History.

II. Discussion:-

1. General.
 - A. The building.
 - B. The librarian.
2. Influence.
 - A. Of the library.
 - a. Prison
 - b. Church
 - c. Home
 - B. Of the author.
 - a. Opinions
 - b. Ideals
3. A means of recreation.
 - A. Working class.
 - B. Student.
4. A means of education
 - A. General
 - B. Special

III. Conclusion.

1. Forms of writing.
2. Duties of community.

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The public library, as all other social institutions, has undergone many changes in its growth. At first these libraries were formed for the purpose of preserving books and documents, rather than as a means of providing reading for the public. It is impossible to state when the first collection was made, but indications of such collections are found in the inscriptions on bricks and tablets buried in Egypt, which scholars today have agreed, belonged to a period as far back as the year 2000 B.C. It would seem that the history of public libraries would date from the first forms of writing, as people have saved their books since they have had any to save.

Perhaps the earliest recorded collection of books is the one of an Egyptian king, Rameses I, 1400 B.C., which bore the inscription, "Dispensary of the Soul", showing how early the library came to be recognized as a force in civilization. Many of these early collections were of clay, baked brick, and later the papyrus and parchments. Some of them were very well regulated; the books were catalogued and arranged systematically on the shelves, many of them being chained. Scattered records of different libraries are found from now on, in Africa and Asia, these countries, rather than Europe, taking the lead.

Perhaps one of the most noted of the early libraries is the Alexandrian library, which was destroyed about A.D. 640. There is much dispute over the library the number of volumes varying from seven to one hundred thousand, but it would seem more probable to suppose that it contained even less than seven thousand, unless each chapter, as was sometimes the custom, was considered as a volume.

The monasteries have been of the greatest aid in tracing back the history of libraries, as it was there that the collections were kept during the periods of revolutions, until the revival of learning when they were preserved at all. These copies were often very imperfect and poorly written, but they serve as the connecting link through this period. The order of the Benedictines was the leader in the revival of learning and very valuable libraries have been established

through their efforts. But these were not public collections. It was not until a great many years after the work of these monks that libraries in any sense, became public.

Benjamin Franklin was the first to start into action, the movement which ended in the establishment of a library. This was a subscription library, and not free to any one at first; that is, they could not draw out the books without paying a fee, but after it was started, those instrumental in founding it, were allowed the free use of all that it contained. It was founded in 1731, and from a subscription library, gradually developed, little by little, up to the position it now holds, that of the largest proprietary library of America. By some persons, this might not be considered the first public library, but rather, the one which was first supported by funds, derived by taxation; but Franklin's certainly was the beginning of the public library spirit, for it was founded for the purpose of a greater degree of intelligence, being more readily accessible to the public, his library being open to all who wished to come and use it. From this start, the library has been rapidly advanced until we have them as they appear today, large, well selected collections for the advancement and amusement of the public, especially that portion unable to procure libraries for their private use.

We have seen that the libraries were founded chiefly for the purpose of providing a means for supplying good literature to the general public. There are many factors which enter into the success of a library and among the first that might be considered would be the building itself.

The library building should be a large, well lighted structure with separate reading rooms. Where there are more than one reading room, one should be reserved especially for the children, as it is found to be more agreeable to everyone concerned. The cataloguing system should be simple, but complete, and it is pleasanter for the reader where he can go to the book stacks himself. There should be good order maintained in all the rooms. The situation of the building is also important. It should be in a quieter part of the city, but not so far

from the business portions as to ^{be}inconvenient for the laborers or the business men.

Perhaps the most important factor in connection with the library is the librarian, so much depends upon her. To begin with, the librarian should have a good general education, be well posted upon books, and one who understands readily the persons who use the books. She can have a great influence on the choice of books read, if she is tactful and understands the persons with whom she deals. So often the librarian is referred to when the reader does not know just what he wants. If the librarian has noted the class of books he reads, she will know just what to suggest; and if those previously drawn out were not, perhaps, the best of that class, she may be the means of persuading him to read of a better, by her suggestions. She should be pleasant and willing, and keep in mind the demands of the people, so when new books are to be ordered, something that they want will be produced. Another way in which she might make the library more attractive would be to place in a prominent place, some articles or books bearing on a leading event, either in our own history, or in that of some foreign country.

The books we read, influence our lives to a greater or less extent. If so, then, the higher our standard of reading, the better we will be. School children as well as newsboys, come to the librarian for books, either reference or amusement for Older students and grown persons come also, but with this last class her influence will not be so great. She will also be consulted when new books are to be ordered and here she should use her greatest influence to procure the best books of all kinds.

The librarians influence extends also to the prison. She may be able to make special arrangements as to the terms on which books are loaned. Then her help in choosing the books should be carefully given. The book sent, of course, depends upon the person who is to read it. If a prisoner is fond of nature, he might enjoy "In God's Out-of-Doors", while another prisoner would hardly look at it. So she must be careful in her choice and to whom they are sent. The books may not do

any good, but it is for the librarian and the person who distributes them to see that they do no harm. All the books should be good, moral ones, whether amusing or serious. The opportunities are greater in the penitentiaries, where the inmates remain a much longer time, giving an opportunity for introducing the more serious and helpful books.

The help of the librarian may also be given to the minister of a community either in writing his sermons by furnishing books or references, or by putting into circulation some articles that might interest the people in his sermons. Also she might be able to introduce Christianity into some home where it is not known by her suggestions or books.

On the private home, the public library should not have as great an influence as it often does, especially among the poorer classes. These are often unable to procure books while very fond of reading. The library reaches the homes through the books they draw. The family may be one of refinement, lacking only the desirable books, not the longing for them. Or the home may be without any culture at all. In the first instance, the library satisfies a want and is, at the same time, a form of education. In the second, the work is much greater; first, perhaps, a desire for books must be awakened; then this desire guided and strengthened until it is strong and wise enough to live by itself; or, harder, the desire for books must be changed from the channel in which it is running, and turned into a new one, one that will act as a help, an education, a church, and a source of amusement. Sometimes the homes of the wealthier classes do not have all of the books they desire, and the library is an aid to them, if only for reference. Sometimes it is through the child that the home is reached. The mother may be overworked and not have the time and perhaps the knowledge necessary to guide her children's tastes so it falls to the librarian.

As mentioned before, the author has an influence on the reader. The degree to which the reader is influenced depends upon the extent upon which the author has revealed himself in his book. He, through his characters, reveals himself; his

ideas of right and wrong, his opinions remain with us, and will, more than likely, influence our decisions. The extent to which this is often carried is shown in some students. They read their favorite authors and it would seem that they are trying to re-live his life, so evident are his opinions and sentiments. This being true, the books one reads cannot be chosen too carefully. We have often been told to read good books, but seldom can we find someone to tell us what is meant by a good book. "Would you know whether the tendency of a book is good or evil, examine in what state of mind you lay it down", is Robert Southerly's definition of a good book, while another author states that the best, or rather the most interesting books are those that bring us closest to the author. The more earnest the author is, the greater harm or good he will do us, according as his ideals are good or bad. It may be that we do not notice the effect of a book, so it would be well to know something of the principles of the author. Often if we do not agree with the author, we may learn something by reading opinions which we do not accept. The diction and English are very helpful, too, because we so often use expressions that we have heard or seen.

Poetry is one of the most elevating forms of writing. A book or production to be successful should be elevating intellectually and morally. From them we should obtain higher ideals and our thoughts should be directed into higher channels. While poetry deals with imagination, some of our most beautiful thoughts, some of our highest inspirations, come from it. The psalms and hymns rank very high among our poetical works. Other forms are also effective in this work. Novels often show a greater influence than a history of religion, or a study of it, because the novel is so much more generally read. Of course only certain novels would be accepted under this head, those which would cause to think about our religions, would present to us some problem in a clear, practical way, or in any way help us. A religion can often be explained in a much clearer manner in the development of a story or character, than by essays or lectures. In this way those who would not read a history of religion, are reached.

As an educator, the library has unlimited opportunities, some of which have been mentioned. For a person who is not attending school or studying along any certain line, they by the use of the library can keep themselves posted on the affairs of the day, scientific discoveries and inventions, conditions of the government, our productive resources and the general conditions of our country compared with other countries. Or if he is interested in a special line of work, he may learn a great deal by the use of books and magazines, he can at least gain a theoretical education, and if he is really desirous of becoming efficient along that line, he will find an opportunity to apply his knowledge. A systematic course of reading would be very helpful in broadening our views and education generally.

The public library seems to appeal mostly to the working classes. Those who can afford private libraries, will not need the public ones. Perhaps the library is used more often as a source of amusement, than for purposes of education but it cannot help but impart some knowledge, either good or evil, even if it is used for pleasure only. For the very poor, their only source of reading may be the library, and reading may be their only recreation. With the student, it is different. The library seems to be indispensable in the preparations of his lessons, and the more he uses it, the more interesting he will find his work. His leisure reading often consists of books recommended by instructors or scientific works along the line he is studying, and perhaps the late novels are what he wants. If the library does not have what he wants, then he goes to the book-store and depends upon what knowledge he may have or upon the clerks. The better educated a person becomes, the less apt he is to want the cheap, sensational novel. The library should contain books to supply his wants. A novel may be just as much help as a scientific journal and will be more read. A student is forced to rely more than the older persons, upon the library, because he cannot carry his personal library with him.

Of the different forms of writing, poetry is the one that quickens the

the imagination. It is one of the most elevating forms, and a book to be successful should be elevating, both mentally and morally. Often it deals with nature, and to know and love nature is to know and love God. History is, for some persons, as entertaining as poetry is for others, but it appeals to the brain, rather than the imagination. It broadens one's mind, and a systematic course in historical reading is a very interesting way of becoming acquainted with our government. Fiction and essay each appeal to certain individuals and have their value.

In order to make a library a success, the people of a community have their part to perform. They must use the books, and provide liberal means to make the library an independent factor in the community.