

THE  
BIBLIOTHECA SACRA.

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ARTICLE I.

FREE PUBLIC LIBRARIES.<sup>1</sup>

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THE library, in the sense of a treasury of books, is not a modern institution. It can boast of great antiquity. The ancient Egyptians made vast collections of parchments. Osymandyas, one of the ancient kings of Egypt, it is claimed, was the first who founded a library. On the entrance of his library building were inscribed the words, "The Dispensary of the Soul"; and on the walls was sculptured "a judge, with the image of truth suspended from his neck, and many books or rolls lying before him." There was a library at Memphis so early in history that Homer was accused of having stolen from it the Iliad and the Odyssey, and of afterwards publishing them as his own. But the most famous collection in Egypt was that wonderful library at Alexandria, founded by Ptolemy Soter about B.C. 300, and afterwards greatly enlarged by Ptolemy Philadelphus. It contained at one time seven hundred thousand volumes; and when destroyed by the Saracens A.D. 642, so vast was the collection, that the parchments were distributed among the four thousand baths of the city to be burned, and it required "six months to consume them."

<sup>1</sup> The substance of this Article was delivered as an Address at the opening of the Free Public Library at Newton, Mass., June 17, 1870.

The Hebrews had their archives, their repositories of literature. The Persians possessed a "a house of the rolls." The Greeks gathered large numbers of books in public and private repositories. Plutarch tells of a library at Pergamus of two hundred thousand volumes. A public library was founded at Rome B.C. 167. Among the various magnificent projects of Julius Caesar for the embellishment of the Capitol, "was that of a public library, which should contain the largest possible collection of Greek and Latin works." During the reign of Augustus learning was liberally patronized, and large collections of books were made; and afterwards libraries were gathered, to which the public had access, not only at Rome, but in the principal colonies and cities of the empire. But in various ways, by fire, volcanoes, earthquakes, and by the irruptions of Northern barbarians, these invaluable libraries of Italy, which had been growing for several centuries, were destroyed.

The advent of Christianity opened a new era in the history of this institution. When the gospel came, wherever it went, it awoke a wonderful intellectual life, especially among the common people. Throughout Christendom, in the first Christian centuries, schools were established for the instruction of children and youth, and higher institutions of learning were founded in various places. Great Christian scholars soon arose, who wrote books, as well as gathered them into libraries. Libraries were necessarily established at all the chief seats of Christian learning; but the books of Christians were rather for use than for show. It is instructive to notice that in that first and purer age of Christianity, under the influence of the primitive churches, with their simple democratic organization, there was developed, as there always has been under similar conditions elsewhere, and especially in New England and in all the more northern of the United States, a powerful tendency towards popular education. Books were made and used, as they never had been by the pagans, for the promotion of general intelligence. This did not favor the amassing of large libraries in a few places, as

much as the placing of books in the hands and homes of the people, the very end that has always by various methods been sought in New England, and that we are now endeavoring to accomplish by means of our free library system. But as church government became more centralized and corrupt, and the people were taught more by symbols, processions, croziers, ecclesiastical millinery, and less by books, the interest in promoting popular intelligence ceased.

Coming down the Christian centuries, we find that the chief libraries were connected with monasteries. The monks not only made large collections of parchments, but also, with great painstaking, transcribed them, and thus greatly multiplied the copies of valuable works. The facile pen of the monk was the printing-press of those earlier ages. And the service which the monasteries thus rendered to literature is beyond estimate, and counterbalances, in some measure, their evil influence in other directions. But these monastic libraries were in the hands of the various religious orders that founded them, and were of no public utility in their day.

It was not until the great Protestant Reformation came that any general interest was taken in the founding of public libraries. Then occurred a great change in the popular estimation of the educational value of this institution. Christianity, once more disenthralled and purified, immediately inspired the people with unwonted zeal in promoting popular intelligence. And, among other means brought into requisition in aid of the education of the masses, was the public library. Previously, large collections of books had been made for the benefit of particular classes, — of religious orders, of universities, and of the learned generally, — but not for the benefit of the people. Free libraries were not founded in any country for popular use before the time of the Reformation. Then appeared, for the first time, the germ of what we now call a free public library. This institution had its origin in that great religious movement. It is historically, therefore, and essentially, a Christian insti-

tution. The munificence of Protestant Christian men in Germany, some of them the personal friends and co-laborers of Luther, founded libraries, with the expressed stipulation that they should be open to all, without charge. Many of these, which date from the Reformation, still exist. In other European countries, also, under similar Christian influences, centuries ago, libraries were established which were designed by their generous founders to be free to all the people. Yet most of these, as well as most of the public libraries gathered in Europe in more modern times, so far as they were designed to reach all classes in the community, have failed of their end. For, while they were intended to be free, yet such has been their location or management, and such the character of the works gathered into them, that they have actually met the wants of only a few classes, chiefly students, professional, and learned men. Many of the public libraries of both Europe and America, which were honestly intended to aid popular education, fail of their purpose, simply because they are not popular in their character. They are not broad and catholic in the range of their books. They are not fitted to the immediate and pressing needs of all classes of people. They are valuable to scholars, but not to the working population. Professional men make great use of them ; but the mechanic, the farmer, the clerk, and merchant are seldom seen among their alcoves.

The need of some change in the character and management of public libraries, and a deepening sense of this need among the people, have already opened a new era in the history of this invaluable institution. In bringing about this change, wise and benevolent men in our own country have taken a conspicuous part. The people of New England have always valued and made large use of the public library. It is no new institution with them. The founding of libraries was begun by the New England colonists at the same time that they founded their schools and colleges. In 1638, only eighteen years after the landing of the Pilgrims at Plymouth, and only eight years after the settlement of Boston by

Puritans, Harvard College was founded at "Newtown," now Cambridge, and the gathering of a college library was immediately commenced. Sixty-two years later, or in 1700, when a few ministers of the gospel proposed to found a college in the colony of Connecticut, it is recorded that, at a preliminary meeting, "each of the ten founders brought with him some books, and, placing them on the table, said: 'I give these books for the founding of a college in this colony.'" Nor did our forefathers confine their attention to the establishment of libraries in their higher institutions of learning. School libraries sprang up in connection with the public schools of the colonies. Proprietary libraries, founded and owned by shareholders, and designed for a limited circulation, have been common in New England from the very beginning of her history. And probably in no country in the world has more interest been taken in the gathering of small private libraries, and in the general distribution of books in the homes of the people.

Nevertheless, during the present century, the great need of public libraries, both in this country and Europe, which should be better adapted to meet the wants of all classes, has been pressing itself more and more upon the attention of thoughtful men. But what could be done? Various expedients have been tried. Parochial libraries, or libraries connected with parishes and churches, and also Sabbath-school libraries, have been very generally established in both this country and England. But these are special in their character and aim, and do not meet the general need. Legislation has generously aided in the founding of school libraries connected with public schools, especially in this country and in France. But these have been sometimes too juvenile in their character, and always too limited in the range of their books, to meet the great public want. Subscription and circulating libraries have accomplished something; but they have been utterly inadequate to supply reading for the masses.

It was not until about the year 1847, that the idea of sup-

plying suitable reading in all departments of literature, to all classes in the community, without charge to any, began to take practical shape and embody itself in a permanent institution. What we now call a Free Public Library really had birth only twenty-three years ago. Not that there were no free libraries before this; there were many such; but on account of their character, or management, or for some other reason, they failed to meet the great popular want. But now, at last the time had fully come for the founding of libraries in cities, towns, and villages, designed especially not for the poor nor for the rich, not for working men nor for professional men, not for merchants nor mechanics nor scholars, not for young men nor old men, not for colleges nor for schools nor for churches, not for any religious nor for any secular order, not for any particular class or classes, but designed for all of every class in the community, so that every person, whatever his position or occupation, might have offered to him, without price, just the reading he would most need to aid him in his trade or calling, and in the attainment of general culture, limiting the range of books only by the rule that immoral and vicious, weak and worthless, books should not be provided. The idea is a grand one. It was entertained by individuals centuries ago; but it has never, until recently, been fully embodied in a permanent institution. "Twenty years ago," says a recent writer, an ex-librarian of the Boston Atheneum, Mr. William F. Pool, than whom no man is more competent to speak upon this subject, "there was not a free town library in this country nor in England. Now they number hundreds; and the time cannot be far distant when a well-furnished public library, free of access to all its inhabitants, will be as common in every intelligent and enterprising community as free common schools. The principle which lies at the foundation of our common school system, education for all, is the same which has led to the establishment and munificent maintenance of these free libraries."

But what has effected this great change? To whom is

the world indebted for this new facility for promoting popular education? Two questions are already in dispute; namely, Who had the honor of originating the idea of a free public library? and, What place has the honor of first possessing such an institution? It cannot be denied that this institution sprung up in several different places, both in this country and England, about the same time, through the suggestion and munificence of different men. A growing demand for a freer and more public use of books had made itself felt, and doubtless the idea of a free public library had been lying latent in many minds. But who first announced the idea, and embodied it in a living institution?

On commencement day at Brown University, September 1, 1847, President Francis Wayland made public his purpose to contribute five hundred dollars, upon the fulfilment of certain conditions, for the founding of a free public library in the town of Wayland, Massachusetts. On November 8, 1847 the town chose a committee to procure a room for the library; and on March 6, 1848, formally and legally accepted the offer of President Wayland. At the last date the town "had one thousand dollars with which to purchase books for a free public library." The first purchase of books was made June 28, 1850; and on August 7, 1850, books for the first time were delivered from the library. The purpose and character of this institution are made evident in Article fifth of the "Library Regulations." "Any resident in town over the age of fourteen may have access to the library, and may take therefrom one volume at a time, provided no family has more than three volumes at a time."<sup>1</sup> Thus it is evident that on August 7, 1850, a free public library, in full operation, was held by the town of Wayland in its municipal capacity.

In the process of establishing this library considerable embarrassment occurred from the circumstance that there

<sup>1</sup> A pamphlet, entitled, "Origin of the Free Public Library System of Massachusetts, by Rev. Jared M. Heard, 1860," to which we are indebted for the facts we have given in respect to the library at Wayland.

was then no legislative act authorizing cities and towns to found and maintain public libraries. During the session of the State Legislature in 1850 "the suggestion was made to one of its members by one of the inhabitants of Wayland to have such an act passed by that body, but no action was attempted." In 1851, Rev. John B. Wight was the member from Wayland of the Massachusetts Legislature. Familiar with the legal difficulties which had been encountered in establishing a free public library in the town he represented, he applied to the chairman of the judiciary committee, the Hon. Caleb Cushing, to prepare a law which should remove these difficulties. "Mr. Cushing expressed great pleasure that one movement was desired in the Legislature which had not for its object a selfish end or personal aggrandizement. He advised Mr. Wight to prepare a bill himself, convinced that he would be allowed to report the same, without reference to any committee. Mr. Wight accordingly prepared the bill, and was allowed by the House the honor of reporting it without reference to a committee"<sup>1</sup> The act was passed May 24, 1851, and authorizes any city or town of the Commonwealth to raise money by taxation, to a certain amount, for the founding and maintenance of free public libraries. "The object aimed at in procuring the passage of this act," said Mr. Wight, "was not merely to prevent the necessity of special legislation whenever any city or town might wish to have such a library, but to bring the formation of free public libraries before the public mind, that it might recommend itself to universal adoption as an important supplement to the common schools, academies, and colleges in the subsequent and life-long education of the public."<sup>2</sup>

Thus the founding of a free town library by the suggestion and munificence of President Wayland led directly to important legislation, which was designed to encourage, and has greatly encouraged, the establishment of similar institutions throughout the State.

<sup>1</sup> "Origin of the Free Public Library System of Massachusetts." By Rev. J. M. Heard, p. 10.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* p. 9.

In the "First Annual Report of the Trustees of the New Bedford City Library," published in 1853, is found the following statement: "In the work of organizing a pioneer institution like our free public library, but little aid could be obtained from the labors of others. No such institution as that whose first Report is now submitted to the government of the city has ever thrown open its doors to the public in this, or in any other country. Ours is the first free public library." In subsequent Reports the same claim is repeated, and in the seventeenth Report, published in 1869, the trustees of the New Bedford library say: "We claim that ours was the pioneer institution of this character." This claim is repeated, in this instance, in connection with a just criticism upon a statement of our somewhat famous countryman, Elihu Burritt. In his work, published in London, in 1868, and entitled, "Walks in the Black Country and its Green Border Land," he gives an account of the Birmingham free public library; and, speaking of its establishment by the people, he says: "They did what no community in America has yet done; and in the doing of it they have taken a step in advance of anything we have accomplished in this department of popular education. We have taxed every man, whether he has children or not, to open and support free schools; but we have never gone so far as to levy a rate upon the population of a town to establish a free library. In this the Birmingham people have beaten the most enlightened and munificent community in America. To their credit, and our reproach, be this said; or, if not to our reproach, then to our stimulus in following this example."<sup>1</sup>

The New Bedford trustees justly rebuke the learned blacksmith for this careless statement, commend him to the works of Mr. Edward Edwards for better instruction, and affirm that their free public library was "a large and flourishing municipal undertaking when the capital of the black

<sup>1</sup> Seventeenth Annual Report of the Trustees of the Free Public Library of the City of New Bedford, p. 12.

country was in the blackness of darkness, as far as free public libraries were concerned." But can they sustain their own claim that when their library was founded "no such institution had ever thrown open its doors to the public, in this or in any other country," that theirs was "the first free public library," "the pioneer institution of this character"? The same Mr. Edward Edwards whose works they commend to the attention of Elihu Burritt makes the following statements: "The first free town library founded upon the territory which is now comprised within the United States of America was founded at New York, at the beginning of the eighteenth century. The founder was the Rev. John Sharp."<sup>1</sup> This institution, it seems, did not remain permanently a free library. "But it was not until 1779 that the institution of 1700 was avowedly converted into a mere proprietary library."<sup>2</sup> "The second free town library in order of date, which was founded within the United States, was the work of James Logan, the friend and confidential adviser of William Penn. . . . This foundation belongs to the first half of the eighteenth century, and to the city of Philadelphia."<sup>3</sup> It is added that this "Loganian library was, and is, an independent institution. It belongs to the citizens at large."

But does the founding of the free library at New Bedford precede the establishment of even the more modern institutions of the kind in this country? From the first Report of the trustees, we learn that their "city library was instituted by an ordinance of the city council, passed August 16, 1852, an appropriation of fifteen hundred dollars having been made on the twenty-sixth of the preceding month for that object." The library was first opened for public use March 3, 1853. The corner-stone of the library edifice was laid August 28, 1856. But the town of Wayland, at a legally called meeting of its legal voters, accepted the offer

<sup>1</sup> Free Town Libraries in Britain, France, Germany, and America. By Edward Edwards, p. 271. London: Trübner and Co. 1869.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid. p. 273.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid. pp. 273, 274.

of President Wayland to found for the use of its inhabitants a free public library, and also unanimously returned thanks, "by rising, with uncovered heads," to the generous donor, on March 6, 1848. "Rules and regulations for the library were adopted May 8, 1848." Books were first delivered from the library May 7, 1850. "The first catalogue of the books of the Wayland town library was printed September 12, 1850." The free library of Wayland, therefore, was founded by municipal action nearly four and a half years before the library at New Bedford was established by an ordinance of the city council. And the former was opened for public use some two and a half years earlier than was the latter. The library at New Bedford is, perhaps, the first that was established under the legislative act authorizing cities and towns to appropriate money for the establishment and maintenance of such institutions, which was passed May 24, 1851. But that act was the result of the founding of the free library at Wayland. The Rev. Jared M. Heard, at the close of his pamphlet, already referred to, upon the "Origin of the Free Public Library System of Massachusetts," asks and answers the three following questions, thus embodying the results of his investigations: "First, What town or city in this commonwealth first established a 'free public library' upon the principle of the free libraries at present to be found in nearly every part of the State, and increasing in number from year to year? Answer: The town of Wayland. Second, What person or persons originated the idea of such libraries? Answer: Rev. Francis Wayland, D.D., of Providence, Rhode Island. Third, What person, or persons, originated the 'Library Act,' approved by the governor of the State, May 24, 1851? Answer: Rev. John B. Wight, of Wayland." The first and third of these conclusions, so far as we can judge from the data at present before us, are correct. But we think it would be difficult to prove that President Wayland was the first who "originated the idea of such libraries." Yet he may have been the first who embodied the idea in a permanent institution in the State of Massachusetts. And

it is undoubtedly true, as claimed by the authors of his excellent memoir, that his thoughtful and judicious gift to the people of Wayland led to the enactment of the library law of Massachusetts, and to the founding of many of the magnificent free public libraries of this state."<sup>1</sup>

But the idea of such an institution, we have said, seems to have been entertained by many minds at about the same time. On October 14, 1847, Josiah Quincy, then mayor of the city of Boston, catching the spirit of the times, offered to the city, on certain conditions, five thousand dollars for the founding of a free public library. This led to important action by the city council, designed to encourage the founding of such an institution, which was followed in 1849 by a donation from Edward Everett of one thousand volumes; and this gift, a little later, or in 1850, by a contribution from John P. Bigelow, then mayor of the city, of one thousand dollars; and this in turn was succeeded by a noble gift from Joshua Bates, of London, himself a native of Boston, of fifty thousand dollars. Thus was founded the magnificent public library of the metropolis of Massachusetts. It was opened for public use as a consulting collection March 20, 1854, and as a lending collection May 2, of the same year.

In other cities and towns of Massachusetts large free libraries have sprung up in rapid succession, as in Peabody in 1852, in Worcester in 1859, in Lynn in 1862, and in Newton in 1869. Indeed it is invidious to name places. During the last twenty years the multiplication of these institutions has been remarkable. Full statistics have not been gathered. But in nearly all our principal cities and towns earnest attention has been given to this subject, and some action has been taken to supply the masses with proper reading. Free public libraries are springing up all over our country. At the present rate of increase, they will soon be numbered, not by scores, as they were a few years since, but by thousands, and the books gathered into them, and read by the people,

<sup>1</sup> Memoir of Francis Wayland, D.D., LL.D. Vol. ii. p. 73.

will be numbered, not by hundreds of thousands, nor by millions, but by billions.

At about the same date that the modern free library movement commenced in this country, the great need of establishing similar institutions in Great Britain began to engage the attention of different thoughtful and benevolent men. In 1849 the subject was brought before Parliament, and in 1850 an act, designed to encourage the founding of free town libraries, was passed, but only by the most persistent effort on the part of the originator of the movement, Mr. William Ewart, in the face of a strong opposition; the bill being carried in the House at first only by a majority of seventeen. This first "Free Libraries Act" of Parliament received the royal assent August 14, 1850. But it made no provision for any but corporate towns, and it was confined to England. In 1853 similar legislation was provided for Ireland and Scotland. Under the influence of this legislation, and through private energy and munificence, there sprang up, in 1852, the great free libraries of Manchester and Liverpool, each containing in 1868 about eighty-six thousand volumes. A free library was founded in Sheffield in 1853, an attempt to establish one in 1851 having been defeated by a large majority. Elihu Burritt thinks that the library at Birmingham antedates all similar institutions in this country, but "the first free library of Birmingham was opened to the public in April 1861."<sup>1</sup> It was founded, therefore, nearly eleven years later than that at Wayland, Massachusetts. It began with about four thousand volumes. In eight years it had increased more than twelvefold, containing in 1869, fifty thousand volumes. Other free libraries were founded in rapid succession in different places. During the short period of eighteen years after the passage of the "Libraries Act" by Parliament, there were established within the United Kingdom twenty consulting and forty-four lending libraries, or sixty-four in all, within which more than four hundred and twenty thousand volumes had been provided for public use, free of charge, "with

<sup>1</sup> Free Town Libraries, by Edward Edwards, p. 139.

ample means for needful renewal from time to time, and for permanent maintenance"; and the annual issues of books from these had reached, in 1868, in the aggregate, nearly three million volumes. All, or nearly all, these libraries are rapidly increasing in magnitude, in popular favor, and in the extent of their usefulness. Thus much with regard to the history of this institution.

Another topic which has awakened not a little interest, relates to the position of the free public library among our popular institutions. Its general management and success will depend very much upon the idea that is entertained of its place and work. The history we have briefly sketched shows that this institution is not only, in many respects, a modern, but also distinctively an educational institution. It is not designed to be simply a depository of books, a garner, a treasury of the literature of past ages, holding what is committed to it for safe keeping, and charged with the mission of delivering over its contents in good order to some future age. That would be a worthy end; but it is not the end of this modern institution. This is rather a benevolent hand, giving our best literature to all the people. It is to enrich, not simply the minds of some future generation, but those of the present. It is not a dead, but a living institution. Nor is it designed to aid men in the pursuit of some particular profession or occupation only. Its aim is broader and grander. It proposes to carry onward and upward the education of the people already begun in other institutions and under other teachers. Its design is to elevate the general intelligence of the people, and also to provide instruction to every person in respect to his own calling, whatever that may be, and to do all this without charge to any. President Wayland briefly and clearly expresses his idea of this institution thus: "Our fathers founded schools where we are taught to read; when we know how to read, we want something to read,— we want books." This is the simple idea; first free schools, and then free books. The free public library aims at a higher, universal education;

and this education it proposes to give without charge. The noble sentiment of George Peabody in founding a public library at Peabody, Massachusetts, was: "Education,—a debt due from present to future generations." And the interpretation given to this sentiment by Hon. Abbot Lawrence, at the laying of the corner-stone of the Peabody Institute, in 1853, clearly defines the place and work of such institutions. "We live in a country" he said, "increasing in the number of its people at the rate of a million a year! And our only security for the preservation of our freedom, and our republican institutions is, *to educate the people*. Not only let there be education, but let it be universal—*a universal education of the people*—and this is the purpose of the institution whose foundation-stone we are called upon to place to-day. It is one of the *germs* of this universal education." And then, in the ceremony of laying the corner-stone, he gave emphasis to the idea that this popular education must be a Christian education, grounded upon the word of God. "I lay this stone in the hope and belief that the building which is to be erected will always be appropriated to the diffusion of knowledge among the whole people; founded upon the principles of true religion, drawn solely from the Bible. I beg to say, especially for the benefit of the younger portion of this great assembly, that, from my own observation and experience, which have not been small, the only safe chart of human life will be found in the holy scriptures; and to you, my young friends, I would recommend, on all occasions and in every position in life, to study the Bible."

A popular Christian education, then, is the idea that lies at the foundation of the free public library. And in its character and purpose, as an educational institution, it is more closely allied to our free common schools, as they have thus far been conducted, than to our academies, colleges, and professional schools. These, for the most part, are open only to those who can stand the test of a prescribed examination, and none of them offer their advantages to any except at a price. But the institution of which we now speak is free.

Its very name is significant of its aim, and of its close alliance to all our civil institutions. We call it the *free* public library. We love this word "free." As a people we have long believed in free governments, free churches, free Bibles, free schools, free men; and now, at last, we have come to believe in free libraries. This last of our free institutions has come late, but it has come; and it completes our system of popular education, and in some respects our system of free institutions also; for our free government and free churches, as well as our free schools, in order to attain the largest power and usefulness, require the aid of the free public library. It was the one thing needed. It will make an invaluable contribution to the intelligence which a free people must possess, if they would maintain their liberties. The elevation of the masses in knowledge as well as in virtue is essential to the perpetuity of our national unity and power. Our free churches also must be intelligent, if they would be saved from fanaticism and ecclesiastical tyranny, and be made wise and mighty in the fulfilment of their heavenly mission.

We hail, then, the advent of the free public library to our cities, villages, and towns with joy and thanksgiving. It comes to be the companion and ally of our common schools; to carry forward the education begun in our seminaries, colleges, and professional schools; to be the crown and glory of our whole system of popular education, and to strengthen and uphold all our free institutions.

But there is a still more practical subject that forces itself upon the thoughts of those who have already established, or are about to establish, a free public library. Of what special benefit shall it be to the people individually? What shall be its practical worth as a public institution? Its practical value and service will depend very largely, of course, upon the popular estimation in which it is held, and the manner in which it is used. A person, even in one of our best New England towns, favored as it may be with the highest order of public schools, may fail of a good common school educa-

tion, simply because he does not properly avail himself of the advantages offered him. And so any person may fail to receive any direct benefit from a free library simply through his own negligence. Nor is this all. It is no small thing for even an educated man to learn how to use wisely, or most beneficially for himself, a large public library. It may open wide its doors to all in the community, and yet many who crowd to its alcoves may find it of no special service to themselves, simply because they have no skill in the use of it.

Within the last twenty years there has grown up a new department of literature, which treats of this whole subject of free public libraries; the founding and endowing of them, the plan of the building, the qualifications of the librarian, the selection, classification, and cataloguing of books, the best methods of making the treasures of the library easily accessible to the public, and of making the public intelligent and wise in their use of these treasures. One of the best works upon this subject is the book, to which we have already referred, of Mr. Edward Edwards, the former librarian of the free town library of Manchester, England, published in London, in 1869. This work is a repository of facts and suggestions upon the whole subject of the conduct and use of free libraries. The people generally, and especially those who have the charge of these institutions, need the information which such books furnish in order to secure to themselves and to others the largest service the free library can render. A series of Articles by Prof. Noah Porter of Yale College, published in 1868 and 1869, in *Hours at Home*, upon "Books and Reading," now gathered into a volume, if placed as a manual in all the homes of the people, and then faithfully consulted and followed by them, would augment the practical value of a free library a hundredfold. The *Extended Reports* now prepared with great care, and published by the directors of the larger libraries of this kind, both in this country and in Great Britain, give the results of various invaluable experiments which have been made in the working of this institution, and abound in such practical wisdom and sug-

gestions as are now most needed, especially by directors and librarians. It is only through a wise use of the experience of others that the greatest benefit of the free library can be immediately secured to the community. Its actual worth to the public must depend very considerably upon its general management, and still more, perhaps, upon the intelligence, wisdom, and faithfulness of the people in the use of it.

But in one particular there can be no failure. Individual minds will discover for themselves the treasures of a free library, make large use of them, and receive great benefit from them. In every community there are certain persons, often among the young, who hunger and thirst after knowledge, and who yet have not the means to gratify their craving. These persons are often endowed with unusual intellectual capacities. With proper culture, they grow up to be largely influential and useful, the wise leaders in church and state. Without culture, they become wild and visionary, conceited and dogmatic, the disturbers and pests of society, and often prove to be the greatest hinderance to the intellectual, moral, and religious progress of the community. The great historic movements in the church and in the state, are not unfrequently occasioned by powerful individual minds. One or two men often determine largely the history of a town, sometimes of a nation. It would pay, if for no other purpose, to establish public libraries to give intelligence and discipline, tone and balance, to this one class of men. The library, indeed, in some of its various forms, has already, through its influence upon such persons, had much to do in shaping the history of our towns and our country. In the year 1766, some ten years only before the stormy days of the American Revolution, Thomas Hollis, one of the noble benefactors of Harvard College, wrote, from England, to Dr. Mayhew of Boston such words as these: "*More books, especially on government, are going for New England. Should these go safe, it is hoped that no principal books on that first subject will be wanting in Harvard College, from the days of Moses to these times. Men of New England, brethren,*

use them for yourselves, and for others; and God bless you!" And again he wrote: "I confess to bear propensity, affection, towards the people of North America, those of Massachusetts and Boston in particular, believing them to be a good and brave people. Long may they continue such! And the spirit of luxury now consuming us to the very marrow here at home, kept out from them! One likeliest means to this end will be to watch well over their youth, by bestowing on them a reasonable, manly education, and selecting thereto the wisest, ablest, most accomplished of men that art or wealth can obtain; for nations rise and fall by individuals, not numbers, as I think all history proveth. With ideas of this kind have I worked for the *public* library at Cambridge, in New England."<sup>1</sup> "For nations rise and fall by individuals, not numbers, as I think all history proveth." Truer or more pertinent words were never written as expressive of reasons for founding a public library. Reach these powerful, leading individual minds in the community with the wisdom and learning of good books, and you will largely control the sources of local and national history. And there are many such minds in all our communities—minds that turn naturally and eagerly towards knowledge, as plants do to the light. These will find the free library, search it through for its treasures, and receive from them a tone and culture that will greatly augment the degree and healthfulness of their influence upon the grand history of their times.

One of the most remarkable instances of this intellectual hunger, of which we speak, and of the salutary results of properly gratifying it, is found in the life of Daniel Webster. His father was a hard-working farmer, of very small pecuniary resources, living in a wild, frontier town, in the state of New Hampshire. But he knew the worth of books, and had taken the lead in establishing a small circulating library in the neighborhood. The boy Daniel, prompted by the craving

<sup>1</sup> The Pulpit of the American Revolution, by John Wingate Thornton. Introduction, pp. 32, 33.

within him, flew to this library, and read all its books with the greatest avidity. This eagerness for learning impressed the father, and although in very straitened circumstances, and with a large family to support, he resolved that his boy, then fifteen years of age, should have a collegiate education. The announcement of his purpose to his son is one of the most touching incidents in modern biography. It is best related in Webster's own words: "I remember" he says, "the very hill which we were ascending, through deep snows, in a New England sleigh, when my father made known this purpose to me. I could not speak. How could he, I thought, with so large a family, and in such narrow circumstances, think of incurring so great an expense for me? A warm glow ran all over me, and I laid my head on my father's shoulder and wept."<sup>1</sup> Repairing to a neighboring town to be fitted for college under the instruction of a Congregational minister, he found in the place another circulating library, and the intensity of delight with which he read the books is illustrated by his own subsequent reference to one of them. In this library was a copy of Don Quixote. It is said to have been "the common translation, and in an edition of three or four duodecimo volumes." "I began to read it," says Webster, "and it is literally true that I never closed my eyes until I had finished it; nor did I lay it down, so great was the power of that extraordinary book on my imagination."<sup>2</sup>

Now it is not true, that every youth, even with proper educational facilities, can become what Daniel Webster became; but it is true that in all our communities there are many who have this same thirst for general learning. Let the intellectual wants of such youth be met, not by a library of perhaps a dozen volumes, but by the ample provisions of such institutions as are now established so numerous in our country, and their minds will early become enriched with a wisdom and culture, which will give them balance

<sup>1</sup> Life of Daniel Webster, by G. T. Curtis. Vol. i. p. 22.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid. Vol. i. p. 24.

and completeness of character and vastly augment their usefulness in the world.

But this is only one of the benefits of this institution. Directly or indirectly it will render invaluable service to the whole community. A free public library is a civilizing institution. Its constant influence will be to elevate the conversation and manners of the people. It is a symbol itself of culture and refinement. Its very presence in a town or city, will be an educating power. Its healthful influence will reach far beyond those who read its books. Ideas are like fragrance, pervasive. They cannot be confined to one mind. When the free library has reached one person, with the influence of some invigorating thought or truth, it has reached a score of persons. Free books will give the whole community something to think of and talk about. They will improve social life. They will make the homes of the people better. When new and good books come freely and constantly to their firesides, a new and refining element will be introduced into domestic life. Pleasant and profitable occupation will be found at home, and to many there will be less temptation to spend all the time possible away from their families. Each person also will have facilities for making himself abler and more successful in his particular occupation. Every mechanic in the community may be a better mechanic for the opening of a free library, every merchant a better merchant, every artist more skilful, every farmer more scientific and economical, every professional man better qualified for his profession, and so every person more intelligent and successful in his own calling.

Nor is this all the good that will result. Such an institution is not without a healthful moral influence. Some of the most disagreeable traits of character are seldom found in connection with much intelligence. Conceit and stubbornness, prejudice and bigotry, are born often of ignorance; while humility and courtesy, manliness and charity, are closely allied to culture. It is the ill-informed, and not the

intelligent community that is troubled with all the wild and visionary schemes for social and religious reform. "These books" said Lord Houghton in his address at the opening of the free library of Manchester, England, pointing to the walls around him, "these books are to be enjoyed by all the inhabitants of this place in full community . . . . They will be shared equally by the wealthiest and most intelligent among you, and by the poorest and simplest . . . . It is what lies in these books that makes all the difference between the wildest socialism that ever passed into the mind of any man in this hall and the deductions and careful processes of the mind of the future student who will sit at these tables, and who will learn *humility* by seeing what others have done and taught before him; who will gain, from sympathy with past ages, intelligence and sense for himself."<sup>1</sup>

Weighty words are these, and forcibly expressive of one of the noblest benefits of a free public library. By nothing is true moral and religious reform more impeded than by the wild vagaries of the ill-informed and the fanatical. It is only those who are ignorant of the past, who, in political, educational, and Christian work, insist upon wasting time in experimenting with old methods, which they idly imagine they, or the advanced men of their day, have originated, but which in truth have already been tried a thousand times, and found to be worthless. Make the community intelligent, and you save years of valuable time and measureless human energy for the service of true civilization and Christianity; you destroy the occupation of mere zealots, and give ample opportunity for those great moral and religious forces, and those Christian instrumentalities, which God has appointed to accomplish their immortal work.

We know, then, of no valuable interest in the community, educational, secular, social, moral, or religious, that is not promoted by this modern institution, the free public library. Its plan is broad and comprehensive. Its purpose is to be helpful to everything we most value and love in our political,

<sup>1</sup> Free Town Libraries, by Edward Edwards, p. 93.

educational, and religious life. The library building itself lifts its comely walls, and opens its beautiful library and reading-rooms as a common social centre. It draws together all classes, and promotes their mutual acquaintance and friendship. The object of their common pride, it can hardly fail to be a bond of union, binding together the whole community in fraternal harmony. This new and popular institution comes to bless the people in their homes, in their secular business, in their social life. It comes to enrich their minds and hearts with wisdom, to make them capable of greater happiness and usefulness, and to fit them to act better their part in every place of personal responsibility. It comes to elevate not only the intellectual, but the moral culture of the people, to give character to the very place in which they dwell, to make their town the most desirable possible to live in, to make every square foot of land, every stone and tree, every house, shop, and store worth more in the market, and to conserve and strengthen every good institution and every good influence in the community.

Another topic of great practical interest pertains to the manner of founding a free public library. How shall a community, destitute of this invaluable institution, come into the possession of it? In Great Britain, and in some of the states of our own country, it may now be established by direct taxation. There is no reason why towns and cities, acting in their municipal capacity, should not support free libraries, as well as free schools. Where the law permits this, there is furnished an easy and equitable method of securing at once the advantages of this institution.

But it is instructive to notice that nearly all the free public libraries that have sprung into existence, in this country and in Great Britain, have been founded largely by private munificence. The first free library in New York, and the first, so far as we know, in this country, was founded by Rev. John Sharp. James Logan, a man worthy to be the friend and adviser of William Penn, founded the first free library in Philadelphia. John Jacob Astor, one of the

remarkable men of his day, — a man who could amass vast wealth for himself, and “put many men beside himself on the road to competence”; the founder of the “American Fur Company,” and yet “ambitious to become a civilizer, as well as a pioneer in both trade and in geographical discovery”; in whose “hands peltries became, surely though indirectly, civilizing agents in far distant parts of the world, as well as sources of vast immediate wealth, and also of expanding reproductiveness to American commerce”; and who could number among his “beloved friends” such a man as Washington Irving, — founded the great Astor library, in the city of New York. Rev. Francis Wayland, D.D., President of Brown University, a leading man in the Baptist denomination, and one of the first educators of his time, founded the free town library of Wayland, Massachusetts. The munificence of Joshua Bates, of London, himself once a poor boy in Boston, but who, amidst all the honors and the prosperity conferred upon him at the great commercial centre of the world, “did not forget the period when he was a poor apprentice boy in Boston,” founded the magnificent library that is now the pride of his native city. George Peabody, whose memory two nations conspired to honor at his death, and of whom Rufus Choate, in his address at the dedication of the Peabody Institute, said: “I honor and love him, not merely that his energy, sense, and integrity have raised him from a poor boy — waiting in that shop yonder — to be a guest, as Curran gracefully expressed it, at the table of princes; to spread a table for the entertainment of princes, — not merely because the brilliant professional career which has given him a position so commanding in the mercantile and social circles of the commercial capital of the world, has left him as completely American — the heart as wholly untravelled — as when he first stepped on the shore of England to seek his fortune, sighing to think that the ocean rolled between him and home; jealous of honor; wakeful to our interests; helping his country not by swagger and vulgarity, but by recommending her credit;

vindicating her title to be trusted on the exchange of nations; squandering himself in hospitalities to her citizens; a man of deeds, not of words,—not for these, merely, I love and honor him, but because his nature is affectionate and unsophisticated still; because his memory comes over so lovingly to this sweet Argos, to the schoolroom of his childhood, to the old shop and kind master, and the graves of his father and mother; and because he has had the sagacity and the character to indulge these unextinguished affections in a gift not of vanity and ostentation, but of supreme and durable utility,”—*he* founded the noble institution that bears his name, in Peabody, Massachusetts. The Hon. J. Wiley Edmands, one of the leading and successful business men of Boston, and a man whom his fellow-citizens always love to honor, founded the free library in Newton, Massachusetts.

And equally indebted are the people of England to private munificence for the establishment of their free libraries. Sir John Potter, a benevolent merchant prince of Manchester, England, founded the great free library of that city. William Brown, a merchant and a statesman, a man of such commanding position and influence that he was able, when the relations of our government to that of Great Britain, during the administration of Franklin Pierce, became very critical, to step forward and act the part of a mediator between the two great countries; a man of whom Hawthorne wrote at the time: “Mr. Brown grasps England with his right hand and America with his left”; this man founded the great free library of Liverpool, and it is already written on the page of history that this was one of the crowning acts of his noble life.

In the same manner many other wealthy and benevolent men have become honorably associated with free public libraries. The number of these historic names has rapidly increased of late years. May their number enlarge still more rapidly in the years to come. Such men will not be forgotten in the communities that are blessed by their benefactions.

The founding of such an institution is one of those deeds that live in the grateful appreciation of many successive generations; live too, not only to be admired by men, but to instruct and ennoble them, fitting them to act a greater and better part in the history of their times. It is well to read history, but it is nobler to make history. The benefactions of these thoughtful and benevolent men will make history. Not for any brief period of time, but for ages, we trust, they will aid in moulding the character of individuals, in ordering public events, and in shaping the history of towns, cities, and nations. All honor, then to these men whose large and wise benevolence has already secured to so many communities this invaluable institution. And all hail to those who shall come after them, taking up the same work in other cities and towns. Every person who founds, or who, by any word, influence, or gift, aids in founding, a free public library will not have lived in vain. He will have done something for which he will deserve well of mankind.