

(April 12, 1909.)

The Public Library as an Educational Institution.

BY MR. GEORGE H. LOCKE, CHIEF LIBRARIAN TORONTO PUBLIC LIBRARY.

ADDRESSING the Canadian Club on the foregoing subject, Mr. George H. Locke, Chief Librarian of the Toronto Public Library, said:

Mr. President and fellow members of the Canadian Club: It is a pleasure to appear before the Canadian Club—this forum of public opinion, where have appeared men of all kinds, each to talk of that which interested him most and which he thought was of some moment in the development of Canadian life and character.—All the way from those two erstwhile colleagues of mine, *Robertson*, who sees everything through the goggles of a harvester, and who smells regeneration in clover and apple blossoms, to *Muensterberg*, whose psychology has at last brought up where we who studied under him always thought it ought to—viz., in relation to crime. It was little less than a crime to have to study it. Truly the minds of Canadian men should be broadened with the process of these suns. And so the Canadian Club is fostering the true spirit of education—the continuous reconstruction of experience that man may become a socialized individual.

This is a time of stock-taking in the commercial world. I know it, for I have been able to get some bargains for the library. I am wondering whether the citizens whom I see before me to-day ever think that it might be worth while for the heads of municipal enterprises, toward the support of which taxes are paid, to come before these citizens once each year and in New-England Town-Meeting style tell of the stock on hand, the progress of the year, the dividend available, either in cash or in social service, and outline the policy of the ensuing year. I am wondering whether the public is taken sufficiently into the confidence of the managers of these great enterprises and industries so that there may be a clearer idea of the function and the result of the enterprise.

We have here in the city of Toronto, a library of over 140,000 volumes, 60,000 of which are in what is known as the Reference Department, most wisely selected and furnishing valuable information on almost every subject, e.g., to the man who wished to see a picture of a flea with letterpress that would illuminate his mind on that animal and its habits (he was a promoter of insect powder and wished to improve his "line of talk"), to the man who rushed in to study Genesis that he might defend the new theology. This part of the library is now being moved to the corner of St. George and College Sts., where it will be housed in a well-planned, dignified, and eminently suitable building. This library is for daily use and I am hoping that we shall be able to include the night in the day, and that from 10 a.m. to 10 p.m., or thereabouts, there will be available to the people of Toronto in a beautiful, and comfortable, well-ventilated building, these books that will help to increase the social efficiency of the citizens.

The Reading Room where 300 persons may sit comfortably at the tables with shaded lights will not be excelled for comfort on this continent. The riches of this department of the library are as yet almost unknown to the ordinary citizen.

Then there are 100,000 books for circulation in the Church Street Central circulating library, the new College Street branch, the Yorkville Avenue and the Queen and Lisgar, all equipped with beautiful reading rooms and managed on the open-shelf system, where the public are allowed access to the books, the two smaller branches at St. Andrews Market and Bolton Avenue, the new library at West Toronto and a new branch about to be put up on the gaol property over the Don.

This, then, is the local situation. This is what our stock-taking shows—made possible by the efforts of the late Mr. Hallam and the late Dr. Bain, to whose industry, intelligence and integrity, the citizens of Toronto owe a debt of gratitude worthy of commemoration,—and joined with these must be mentioned Mr. Carnegie, to whose generosity we owe our buildings.

I presume that each person here has in his mind a fairly good idea of what a library is, and yet I fancy he would be modest in stating his definition in set terms. We know a great deal which we can't adequately and tersely express—this is a consolation accorded to human beings.

The library may be anything from a collection of books to a living, civilizing social force in the community, recognized as

having rank with the school and the church. There may be some Sir Anthony Absolute here to-day who may confidentially mention to a Mrs. Malaprop—not here but at the Ladies' Club—that “a circulating library in a town is an evergreen tree of diabolical knowledge.” I know such men. They spend much time at bridge whist and lament the silly reading of the lower classes; or there may be some one who has had an experience such as I had last week which illustrates the possibilities of a library as an educational institution.

In the office building of the Company in Boston, there was an elevator boy named Herbert. He was a bright, clean-cut lad, who confided to some of us that he was ambitious to rise in the world—the elevator was a slow one. We found his aptitudes—with his fingers a good penman, good artist material, we encouraged him to go to the Public Library, suggested books, got him a position in Boston & Maine Auditor's Dept. This was two and a half years ago.

A letter dated March 29, on Boston & Maine paper says, “I have been working hard and reading and taking an interest in politics. In February, you may be interested to know, I was elected to represent Ward 1 in the City Council of Cambridge. I am a Democrat, and going to be true to its principles.

Yours truly,

JOHN A. MACDONALD.

Alias Herbert.

The library movement has a history which might be interesting to you if we had time to trace its evolution from the old time library that *preserved the books*, to the new time or modern library, which *serves the reader*, from the old time librarian who knew and lived among his books to the modern librarian who must know and live among the people. In this, as in every great movement, the emphasis of to-day is upon the *psychological* rather than upon the *logical*—upon the human element and its needs, not upon the mere logical arrangement of intimate things.

The Modern Library movement aims to increase by every possible means the *accessibility of books*, to *stimulate their reading*, to *create a demand for the best—helpfulness and enlightenment* towards *usefulness* might serve as a motto.

The situation in our social life is briefly this—we spend almost twenty-five times as much on our public schools in Toronto as on our public libraries. The average years of

schooling are five; hence there are each year thousands of children leaving school to go to work—children with but a feeble grasp of even the instruments of knowledge: *Reading, Writing, Arithmetic*. Their educational days are over except for the education that is gained from experience, and as old Roger Ascham, the first of the great English writers says, concerning the value of *learning* and *experience*: “Learning teacheth more in one year than experience in twenty, and learning teacheth safely when experience maketh miserable. He hazardeth sore that waxes wise by experience. An unhappy Master is he who is made cunning by many shipwrecks; a miserable Merchant is he who is neither rich nor wise but after some bankrupts. It is costly wisdom that is bought by experience.”

We learn little by experience. You run your head against a business stone wall, you rub your head and remark that the wall is harder than your head. You have learned that by experience. Of course, I am willing to grant that there are some who can learn only that way. At the best, experience is a wasteful teacher. Where then is the boy to get the education that will help him to attain success? Where can he obtain information that will enable him to progress in his work so that he may rise and be recognized? Modern industrialism exacts from the artisan and the worker in every branch increased skill and knowledge and the public library should furnish to the ambitious youth the *opportunity* to rise. Invention is the result of accumulated knowledge so that it may serve the ambitious one. The library is the depository of this accumulated knowledge.

The school gives the ability to read. The library develops the reading habit by giving the people an opportunity to read. While serving those who come for recreation—a perfectly legitimate part of the function of a library—it does more, for it offers opportunity for self-development to the ambitious one. As Andrew Carnegie himself so well put it, “A library is fruitful because it gives nothing for nothing; it helps only those who help themselves; it does not sap the foundation of manly independence; it does not pauperize; it stretches a hand to the aspiring and places a ladder upon which they can ascend only by climbing themselves.”

But we may say—does the library reach the working classes? There are no classes in a library. It is the broadest

of all democratic institutions; it is the most democratic of all our institutions; it levels rank by levelling *up* not *down*.

Education for the artisan—(technical, so-called) seems now to be in the air—very much in the air. Some of my friends who are urging this bread and butter idea of education that makes for *money*, not for ideas or development, remind me of what Luther said of Erasmus: "Erasmus stands looking at creation like a calf at a new door—curious not to know how the door came there, but only to know whether it leads to something to eat."

As Mr. Crothers says,—“Our minds are essentially alike. Every person’s mind is either a vast field of knowledge with spots of ignorance or a vast field of ignorance with spots of knowledge.” Now, whether it is a spot or a field that needs cultivation, the library stands ready to help to the proper selection of seed, and the most improved methods of tilling, and does not ask for a share in the proceeds. We don’t do business in the percentage basis. Giving does not impoverish us.

But the library is not merely a dispenser of information to those who are ambitious enough to know what they want or at least to know where they can find something that may be what they want. It must be more. *It must show the people what it has which it thinks the people may want.* In other words, it must advertise the goods or it becomes merely a resort for a class—the initiated—who know of it and have the leisure to cultivate it. Therefore, the library enters the field as a positive educational factor, useful to all who are out of school and who are ambitious to become useful. Its courses are elective and it aims to make them attractive; it is practical because it gives what *you* think you want, not what a learned body of men think you want. Its entrance requirements are as simple as the entrance requirements into the Methodist Church in Wesley’s time—“a desire to flee from the wrath of God and be saved from your sins.” There are no expenses and the reward to the institution is in the realization of helpfulness. This helpfulness ought not to confine itself to books; it ought to, in a visual and in a tangible way, show what may be learned from books—in other words, there ought to be lectures and practical demonstrations of the difference between an artisan and an artist in any trade, and how the artisan may become an artist. Not dissolving views of ancient temples, but educative pictures of modern

buildings in different stages of construction and illustrated in the process by real bricks and mortar.

The public library of Toronto, I hope, will have these and many other distinguishing features which will make its work inspiringly useful and instructionally valuable so that it may deserve to be called the educational. These are all possibilities, not mere Cobalt prospectuses; one must have ideals if he would succeed—even so must an institution, for its ideals are only the social consciousness of its leaders. There are many aspects of this work which I have not touched on—its relation to the children and to the homes of those who need sunshine, gladness and guidance. There is some of that being done now in this very city.

But we hope to proceed towards these things in a practical evolutionary manner.

I have been too long in prosaic business to be as enthusiastic as the Irishman who protested so loudly and emphatically of his love to his wife and family and to make it beyond reproach said—“I love you so much I would lay down my life for your sake.” Nora, imperturbable, collected, and experienced, said calmly, “I don’t want you to lay down your life, I want you to lay down the hall carpet.”

We are laying carpet.

What do we need to carry out this work? Not money, that will come some day, when cities of over 100,000 with the multitude of problems that belong peculiarly to them will be treated on the same basis as those under 100,000.

What we need to make our work a success is sympathy. Let me quote a paraphrase that I like to use in connection with library work to illustrate the attitude that those in the library should preserve towards an enquiring public. And may I not claim something of the same spirit from the public towards the library.

Sympathy never faileth. Whether they be references they shall fail, whether they be queries they shall cease, whether they be books they shall be taken away, and now abideth knowledge, industry, sympathy, these three, but the greatest of these is sympathy.

I am reminded by the lateness of the hour of a book which I saw advertised in a catalogue from England: “Shut your mouth and save your life,” with 29 illustrations, Cloth, London, 1875, in fine second-hand condition, \$1.50.