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978-1-108-01221-8 - Memoirs of Libraries: Including a Handbook of Library Economy,  
Volume 3

Edward Edwards

Excerpt

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*PART THE SECOND.*

**ECONOMY OF LIBRARIES.**

BOOK I.

BOOK-COLLECTING.

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Of them that writen us to fore  
The bokes dwelle: and we therfore  
Ben taught of that was writen then.  
For our good is that we also,  
In our time among us here,  
Do write of newe some mattere  
Ensampled of the olde wise;  
So that it might, in suche a wise,  
When we be deade and elsewhere,  
Be lere to the worldes ere,  
In tyme comyng after this.

GOWER (*De Confessione Amantis*, Prologus).

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## CHAPTER I.

RUDIMENTS OF BOOK-COLLECTING; WITH  
MORE ESPECIAL REFERENCE TO PUBLIC  
LIBRARIES.

.... An English Gentleman should be well-versed in the History of England, taking his rise as far back as there are any records of it; joining with it the Laws that were made in the several ages, that he may observe from thence the several turns of State, and how they have been produced. With the History he may also do well to read the ancient Lawyers. .... To the reading of History, Chronology and Geography are absolutely necessary. To Geography, books of Travels may be added. ....

There is another use of Reading which is for diversion and delight. Such are Poetical writings, especially Dramatic, if they be free from .... what corrupts good manners; for such pitch should not be handled.

LOCKE (*Some Thoughts concerning Reading and Study*; Works, iiii, 293-300).

It may fairly be exacted of those who undertake the formation of a Library for the Public, that they should form clear ideas of the aims with which it is established; of the studies which it is more especially intended to facilitate; and of the probable requirements of those who may be expected to form the majority of its fre-

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RUDIMENTS OF BOOK-COLLECTING.

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Necessity of Na-  
tional Libraries  
being 'Encyclo-  
pædical' in their  
contents.

quenter. To a great National Library, indeed, all kinds and varieties of books are welcome, and may wisely be sought for. But a Library of this class is rather a growth than a formation. Almost every such Library that is now extant has been begun by the acquisition of some considerable collection already formed, and, in most cases, has absorbed many private Libraries before any very definite plans have been laid down for its development. When the period shall have come for preparing plans of future and systematic increase, such plans must shape themselves with a view to filling up by degrees *all* the classes of literature which are weakly provided in the existing collection, rather than to the impressing upon it any one leading characteristic. National Libraries should be the store-houses whence educators of every kind may derive their materials, rather than direct educational agents themselves. If we must designate them by any descriptive epithet at all, we can but call them 'encyclopædical.' They must contain alike the most costly and enduring monuments of literature, and its slightest and most trivial "ephemera." The "trash" of one generation becomes the highly prized treasure of another. What a Bodley at the end of the sixteenth century calls "riff-raff ... which a Librarykeeper should disdain to seek out, to deliver to any man," a Bodley's Librarian has to buy, amidst keen competition, and almost for its weight in gold, at the beginning of the nineteenth; since, by that time, it has come to be apparent that the obscurest pamphlet, or the flimsiest ballad, may throw a ray of light upon some pregnant fact of history, or may serve as the key to an enigma in some

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grand life-career which gave to an age its form and pressure.

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It may, doubtless, be somewhat startling to contemplate the kind of receptacles which will by and bye be required for this comprehensive storing up of both the literature, and the historic raw-material, as well of the present as of past ages. Such is the activity of the press in these days, that we may estimate the number of *volumes* annually produced in three only of the countries of Europe—Britain, France and Germany—as considerably exceeding 20,000.<sup>1</sup> So alarming indeed, did this rapid production—even when it was much less rapid—long ago appear to some minds, that, as I remember, a trenchant critic lamented (half sportively, but half in earnest,) that there is no epidemic among books to thin their ranks, and that the fire-proof inventions of the present day extinguish all future hope of the deliverances which were occasionally realized, by the timber boards of our books, and the wooden carpentry of our Libraries.<sup>2</sup> To critics of quite another calibre it will probably seem a very absurd thing to contemplate “encyclopædical” book-collecting, in any case. When persons unaccustomed to the sight of a great Library visit one for the first time, they often put the question:—“Are all these books ever read?” Nor is it easy to convince them that the books which no man,—

<sup>1</sup> In the year 1854, the number of volumes of English production, actually delivered at the British Museum, under the Copyright-Act, was 5787. I have not present access to the latest issues of the French *Journal de la librairie*, or of the Leipsic Catalogues, but I may state that in 1847 the number of *separate works* published in Germany was 11,400, and that of those published in France, 5530.

<sup>2</sup> *Quarterly Review*, lxx, 71.

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of this century at all events,—would ever think of “*reading*,” are precisely those which it is most important that a *national* collection should possess. However excellent the old advice that the student should aim to master thoroughly a few books, rather than to dip into a great many, it would fare ill with the man who has to use books as his daily tools, were that principle to govern the formation of Libraries. For the useful and honourable craft of “book-makers,” we must continue to have vast miscellaneous store-houses, and the more extensive these are, the larger will be the proportion borne by the mere books of reference to the aggregate numbers, and the larger also will be the proportion of the “trash,” or as Mr. Carlyle is fond of calling them (although few men are more skilled than he is, in their transmutation into gold), of the “rubbish-heaps” of days departed.

But besides those great repositories, for whose enrichment nets of all sorts must be continually cast into the rivulets as well as the deep seas of learning, we need Libraries of narrower aims and more specific character. Of these some will be professional—as Law Libraries, Divinity Libraries, Medical Libraries, and the like, and their formation cannot be better provided for than by entrusting it to some one professional man of known and eminent skill in his department. Many, too, and of easy access are the appliances which lie ready to his hand for facilitating the task. Far more difficult will be the labour of planning, advisedly and with forecast, those Provincial and

Town Libraries. Town Libraries, having a distinctly popular and edu-

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cational character, yet aiming to meet the requirements and to subserve the uses of *all classes* of the population, in which hitherto the United Kingdom has been so confessedly deficient. Here the combined forethought and the joint labour of many minds will be requisite.

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Elsewhere I have cited, at length, the words in which Bishop Bale expressed his earnest desire that in every shire of England there were at least one Library, "for the preservation of noble works, and the preferment of good learning." Had effect been given to that desire in his own day, not only would many of the choicest treasures of the old monastic Libraries have been saved from destruction, but an excellent foundation would, in all probability, have been laid for special collections on the local topography of each county, and much valuable material of that kind would have been preserved which is now irrecoverably lost. This, I think, should be one of the first departments to receive attention, in the formation of new Libraries for the Public. Every thing that is procurable, whether printed or MS., that bears on the history and antiquities, the fauna and flora, the trade and politics, the worthies and notabilities, and, generally, on the local affairs of whatever kind, of the parish, town and county in which the Library may be placed, and of the adjacent district, should be carefully collected. Wherever unprinted materials of this sort are known to exist in other Libraries, whether public or private, transcripts should be obtained. If the town or district have any great staple trade, every book and pamphlet relating to that trade—generally as well as locally—should be procured, as opportunity

County Libraries  
as storehouses of  
local topo-  
graphy.

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may offer. It will also be of advantage—often in more ways than one—to collect the productions of local printers on whatever subject, however trivial, especially if the town or city have been the seat of an early press.

Advantages of  
making Town  
and Provincial  
Libraries well-  
provided on  
some special  
subjects.

In the next place, it will be well to fix upon some main subjects of a general kind in which the Library shall be especially well-provided. *What* this subject or these subjects shall be, must, of course, depend upon circumstances which will vary in different places. The preferences of the promoters of the Library which is to be formed;—the character and extent of any Library that may already exist in or near the same locality;—the amount of the funds available for purchases;—these, and many other particulars, will have to be taken into account. But, be such circumstances what they may, some one important subject, at all events, should be chosen, upon which the Library shall have, as early as possible, a systematic *Collection*, not a mere chance aggregation, of books. If, for instance, there be no Library in the vicinity thoroughly stored with works on British History, such a class will be worthy of a special preference. Even if the funds for purchases should amount to so goodly a sum as £8000 or £10,000, they would prove utterly insufficient for the formation of a really valuable Library on all subjects, or even on a large number of subjects. But a much smaller sum, if appropriated on the principle of allotting a large portion of it to the purchase of books on some leading topic, and the remainder to that of only the best and most indispensable books on other subjects, will



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lay the foundation of a Library which, from the very beginning, will tend as well to make students as to help them. It will inevitably act, to some extent, as an incitement to systematic rather than to desultory reading. It will, in course of time, attract the attention of those who are both able and willing to add to it; and if the well-laid foundation of one generation have the good fortune to be well built upon by another, it is no mere fancy to anticipate that such an institution must, in many ways, elevate and honour the entire community to which it belongs.

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In order to deal clearly and usefully with the many points of detail which group themselves round this question of the practical building-up of a good Library, it is needful to take with them the course which has to be taken with the books themselves, namely, to classify them. Practically, most good books, like other good things, have to be paid for. Libraries, however, have often, to a great extent, been formed by gifts, and by taxation, as well as by purchase. In some instances, the method of exacting copies of books, by way of tax upon their producers, seems to have preceded the method of acquiring them by purchase. Of late years, another method of increasing the stores of Libraries has come into vogue somewhat prominently,—that of “International Exchange”. I proceed, therefore, to arrange what remains to be said respecting the collection of books for public use, under these four heads: (1) LEGAL TAX, (2) DONATION, (3) EXCHANGE, (4) PURCHASE. “Purchase” I put last, because, obviously, the cha-

Classification of  
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racter of the purchases which have to be made for a Library, will greatly depend on the degree to which it possesses other means of acquisition. In some countries—and, as we have seen, to a very noticeable extent in Russia—a fifth mode of acquiring books has been employed, that of red-handed *spoliation*; but on this method there is no need to dwell, as it is obviously uncertain in operation, and likely to be attended, sooner or later, with inconvenient consequences.

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