

Libraries

THE passion for forming vast collections of books has necessarily existed in all periods of human curiosity; but long it required royal munificence to found a national library. It is only since the art of multiplying the productions of the mind has been discovered, that men of letters have been enabled to rival this imperial and patriotic honour. The taste for books, so rare before the fifteenth century, has gradually become general only within these four hundred years: in that small space of time the public mind of Europe has been created.

Of LIBRARIES, the following anecdotes seem most interesting, as they mark either the affection, or the veneration, which civilized men have ever felt for these perennial repositories of their minds. The first national library founded in Egypt seemed to have been placed under the protection of the divinities, for their statues magnificently adorned this temple, dedicated at once to religion and to literature. It was still further embellished by a well-known inscription, for ever grateful to the votary of literature; on the front was engraven “The nourishment of the soul”—or, according to Diodorus, “The medicine of the mind.”

The Egyptian Ptolemies founded the vast library of Alexandria, which was afterwards the emulative labour

of rival monarchs; the founder infused a soul into the vast body he was creating, by his choice of the librarian Demetrius Phalereus, whose skilful industry amassed from all nations their choicest productions. Without such a librarian, a national library would be little more than a literary chaos; his well-exercised memory and critical judgment are its best catalogue. One of the Ptolemies refused supplying the famished Athenians with wheat, until they presented him with the original manuscripts of Æschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides; and in returning copies of these autographs, he allowed them to retain the fifteen talents which he had pledged with them as a princely security.

Even when tyrants, or usurpers, possessed sense as well as courage, they have proved the most ardent patrons of literature; they know it is their interest to turn aside the public mind from political speculations, and to afford their subjects the inexhaustible occupations of curiosity, and the consoling pleasures of the imagination. Thus Pisistratus is said to have been among the earliest of the Greeks who projected an immense collection of the works of the learned, and is believed to have been the collector of the scattered works which passed under the name of Homer.

The Romans, after six centuries of gradual dominion, must have possessed the vast and diversified collections of the writings of the nations they conquered: among the most valued spoils of their victories, we know that manuscripts were considered as more precious than vases of gold. Paulus Emilius, after the defeat of Perseus, king of Macedon, brought to Rome a great number which he had amassed in Greece, and which he now distributed among his sons, or presented to the Roman people. Sylla followed his example. After the siege of Athens he discovered an entire library in the temple of Apollo, which having carried to Rome, he appears to have been the founder of the first Roman public library. After the taking of Carthage the Roman senate rewarded the family of Regulus with the books found in that city. A library was a national gift, and the most honourable they could bestow. From the intercourse of the Romans with the Greeks the passion for forming libraries rapidly increased, and individuals began to pride themselves on their private collections.

Of many illustrious Romans, their magnificent taste in their *libraries* has been recorded. Asinius Pollio, Crassus, Cæsar, and Cicero, have, among others, been celebrated for their literary splendour. Lucullus, whose incredible opulence exhausted itself on more than im-

perial luxuries, more honourably distinguished himself by his vast collections of books and the happy use he made of them by the liberal access he allowed the learned. "It was a library," says Plutarch, "whose walks, galleries, and cabinets were open to all visitors; and the ingenious Greeks, when at leisure, resorted to this abode of the Muses to hold literary conversations, in which Lucullus himself loved to join." This library enlarged by others, Julius Cæsar once proposed to open for the public, having chosen the erudite Varro for its librarian; but the daggers of Brutus and his party prevented the meditated projects of Cæsar. In this museum Cicero frequently pursued his studies, during the time his friend Faustus had the charge of it; which he describes to Atticus in his 4th Book., Epist. 9. Amidst his public occupations and his private studies, either of them sufficient to have immortalized one man, we are astonished at the minute attention Cicero paid to the formation of his libraries, and his cabinets of antiquities.

The emperors were ambitious at length to give *their names* to the *libraries* they founded; they did not consider the purple as their chief ornament. Augustus was himself an author, and in one of those sumptuous buildings called *Thermes*, ornamented with porticos,

galleries, and statues, with shady walks, and refreshing baths, testified his love of literature by adding a magnificent library. One of these libraries he fondly called by the name of his sister Octavia; and the other, the temple of Apollo, became the haunt of the poets, as Horace, Juvenal, and Persius have commemorated. The successors of Augustus imitated his example, and even Tiberius had an imperial library, chiefly consisting of works concerning the empire and the acts of its sovereigns. These Trajan augmented by the Ulpian library, so denominated from the family name of this prince. In a word, we have accounts of the rich ornaments the ancients bestowed on their libraries, of their floors paved with marble, their walls covered with glass and ivory, and their shelves and desks of ebony and cedar.

The first *public library* in Italy, says Tiraboschi, was founded by a person of no considerable fortune: his credit, his frugality, and fortitude, were indeed equal to a treasury. This extraordinary man was Nicholas Niccoli, the son of a merchant, and in his youth himself a merchant; but after the death of his father he relinquished the beaten roads of gain, and devoted his soul to study, and his fortune to assist students. At his death he left his library to the public, but his debts being greater than his effects, the princely generosity of

Cosmo de Medici realised the intention of its former possessor, and afterwards enriched it, by the addition of an apartment, in which he placed the Greek, Hebrew, Arabic, Chaldaic, and Indian mss. The intrepid resolution of Nicholas V. laid the foundations of the Vatican; the affection of Cardinal Bessarion for his country first gave Venice the rudiments of a public library; and to Sir T. Bodley we owe the invaluable one of Oxford. Sir Robert Cotton, Sir Hans Sloane, Dr. Birch, Mr. Cracherode, and others of this race of lovers of books, have all contributed to form these literary treasures, which our nation owe to the enthusiasm of individuals, who have found such pleasure in consecrating their fortunes and their days to this great public object; or, which in the result produces the same public good, the collections of such men have been frequently purchased on their deaths, by government, and thus have entered whole and entire into the great national collections.

LITERATURE, like virtue, is its own reward, and the enthusiasm some experience in the permanent enjoyments of a vast library has far outweighed the neglect or the calumny of the world, which some of its votaries have received. From the time that Cicero poured forth his feelings in his oration for the poet Archias, innumerable are the testimonies of men of letters of the

pleasurable delirium of their researches; that delicious beverage which they have swallowed, so thirstily, from the magical cup of literature. Richard de Bury, Bishop of Durham, chancellor and high treasurer of England so early as 1341, perhaps raised the first private library in our country. He purchased thirty or forty volumes of the Abbot of St. Alban's for fifty pounds weight of silver. He was so enamoured of his large collection, that he expressly composed a treatise on his love of books, under the title of *Philobiblion*, an honourable tribute paid to literature in an age not literary.

To pass much of our time amid such vast resources, that man must indeed be not more animated than a leaden Mercury, who does not aspire to make some small addition to his library, were it only be a critical catalogue. he must be as indolent as that animal called the Sloth, who perishes on the tree he climbs, after he has eaten all its leaves.

Henry Rantzan, a Danish gentleman, the founder of the great library at Copenhagen, whose days were dissolved in the pleasures of reading, discovers his taste and ardour in the following elegant effusion:

Salvete aureoli mei libelli,
Meae deliciae, mei lepores!
Quam vos saepe oculis juvat videre,

ISAAC D'ISRAELI

Et tritos manibus tenere nostris!
Tot vos eximii, tot eruditi,
Prisci lumina saeculi et recentis,
Confecere viri, suasque vobis
Ausi credere luarbrationes:
Et sperare decus perenne scriptis;
Neque haec irrita spes fefellit illos.

IMITATED.

Golden volumes! richest treasures
Objects of delicious pleasures!
Yon my eyes rejoicing please,
You my hands in rapture seize
Brilliant wits and musing sages,
Lights who beam'd through many ages!
Left to your conscious leaves their story,
And dared to trust you with their glory;
And now their hope of fame achieved,
Dear volumes!—you have not deceived!

This passion for the acquisition and enjoyment of *books* has been the occasion of their lovers embellishing their outsides with costly ornaments: a rage which ostentation may have abused; but when these volumes belong to the real man of letters, the most fanciful bindings are often the emblems of his taste and feelings. The great Thuanus was eager to procure the finest copies for his library, and his volumes are still eagerly

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purchased, hearing his autograph on the last page. A celebrated amateur was Grollier, whose library was opulent in these luxuries; the Muses themselves could not more ingeniously, have ornamented their favourite works. I have seen several in the libraries of our own curious collectors. He embellished their outside with taste and ingenuity—They are gilded and stamped with peculiar neatness, the compartments on the binding are drawn, and painted, with different inventions of subjects, analogous to the works themselves; and they ire their researches; further adorned by that amiable inscription, *Jo. Grollierii et amicorum!*—purporting that these literary treasures were collected for himself and for his friends!

The family of the Fuggers had long felt an hereditary passion for the accumulation of literary treasures; and their portraits, with others in their picture gallery, form a curious quarto volume of 127 portraits, excessively rare even in Germany, entitled “Fuggerorum Pinacotheca.” Wolfius, who daily haunted their celebrated library, pours out his gratitude in some Greek verses, and describes this bibliotheca as a literary heaven, furnished with as many books as there were stars in the firmament; or as a literary garden, in which he passed entire days in gathering fruit and flowers, delighting

and instructing himself by perpetual occupation.

In 1364 the royal library of France did not exceed twenty volumes. Shortly after Charles V. increased it to nine hundred, which by the fate of war, as much as least as that of money, the Duke of Bedford afterwards purchased and transported to London, where libraries were smaller than on the continent, about 1440. It is a circumstance worthy of observation, that the French sovereign, Charles V. surnamed the Wise, ordered that thirty portable lights, with a silver lamp suspended from the centre, should be illuminated at night, that students might not find their pursuits interrupted at any hour. Many among us, at this moment, whose professional avocations admit not of morning studies, find that the resources of a public library are not accessible to them from the omission of the regulation of the zealous Charles V. of France. An alarming objection to night-studies in public libraries is the danger of fire, and in our own British Museum not a light is permitted to be carried about on any pretence whatever. The history of the “Bibliothèque du Roi” is a curious incident in literature; and the progress of the human mind and public opinion might be traced by its gradual accessions, noting the changeable qualities of its literary stores chiefly from theology, law, and medicine,

to philosophy and elegant literature. In 1789 Neckar reckoned the literary treasures to amount to 225,000 printed books, 70,000 manuscripts, and 15,000 collections of prints. By a curious little volume published by M. Le Prince in 1782, it appears that it was first under Louis XIV. that the productions of the art of engraving were collected and arranged; the great minister Colbert purchased the extensive collections of the Abbé de Marolles, who may be ranked among the fathers of our print-collectors. Two hundred and sixty four ample portfolios laid the foundations, and the catalogues of his collections, printed by Marolles himself, are rare, curious, and high-priced. Our own national print-gallery is yet an infant establishment.

Mr. Hallam has observed, that in 1440 England had made comparatively but little progress in learning—and Germany was probably still less advanced. However, there was in Germany a famous collector of books in the person of Trithemius, the celebrated abbot of Spanheim, who died in 1516; he had amassed about two thousand manuscripts, a literary treasure which excited such general attention, that princes and eminent men of that day travelled to visit Trithemius and his library. About this time six or eight hundred volumes formed a royal collection, and their high value in price could

only he furnished by a prince. This was indeed a great advancement in libraries, when at the beginning of the fourteenth century the library of Louis IX. contained only four classical authors, and that of Oxford, in 1300, consisted of a few tracts kept in chests.

The pleasures of study are classed by Burton among those exercises or recreations of the mind which pass *within doors*. Looking about this “world of books,” he exclaims, “I could even live and die with such meditations, and take more delight and true content of mind in them, than in all thy wealth and sport! There is a sweetness, which, as Circe’s cup, bewitcheth a student, he cannot leave off, as well may witness those many laborious hours, days and nights, spent in their voluminous treatises. So sweet is the delight of study. The last day is *prioris discipulus*.” “Heinsius was mewed up in the library of Leyden all the year long, and that which to my thinking should have bred a loathing, caused in him a greater liking. I no sooner, saith he, come into the library, but I bolt the door to me, excluding Lust, Ambition, Avarice, and all such vices, whose nurse is Idleness, the mother of Ignorance and Melancholy. In the very lap of eternity, amongst so mane divine souls, I take my seat with so lofty a spirit, and sweet content, that I pity all our great ones and rich men, that know

not this happiness," Such is the incense of a votary who scatters it on the altar less for the ceremony than from the devotion.

There is, however, an intemperance in study, incompatible often with our social or more active duties. The illustrious Grotius exposed himself to the reproaches of some of his contemporaries for having too warmly pursued his studies, to the detriment of his public station. It was the boast of Cicero, that his philosophical studies had never interfered with the services he owed the republic, and that he had only dedicated to them the hours which others give to their walks, their repasts, and their pleasures. Looking on his voluminous labours; we are surprised at this observation; how honourable is it to him, that his various philosophical works bear the titles of the different villas he possessed; which shows that they were composed in their respective retirements. Cicero must have been an early riser; and practised that magic art of employing his time, so as to have multiplied his days.