

## The Place of Libraries in Relation to Elementary, Secondary, and Higher Education.<sup>1</sup>

WHAT is the place of the public library in a well-organised system of public instruction stretching from the elementary school to the university? The correct answer to this question will only come after considerable discussion of the problem in all its aspects. The time may not yet be ripe for solution, but it is, I think, one opportune for consideration. In England we have nearly completed the organisation of primary instruction, the older universities have been reorganised, and new ones have been created and are in process of creation. Secondary education is slowly emerging from chaos, but there is still a want of symmetry and a lack of harmony in the relations of the various component parts of the educational scheme of the nation. There is even in some directions clashing as well as overlapping. But, looking to what has been accomplished and what may be hoped for in the future, the question again presents itself, "In what way can the public libraries established under the Public Libraries Acts be organically connected with the educational system of the nation?"

When the first free libraries of the modern type were established in England, the share taken by the State in elementary education was small and not welcomed with any overwhelming enthusiasm. Many still clung to the belief that voluntary effort would be sufficient to cope with the evils of national ignorance. The older universities had not yet adapted themselves to modern needs. The town libraries came as a new element in the intellectual life of the people. We speak now of the library as the natural complement of the school, but in accordance with the

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accidental character of many English movements the municipal library preceded the municipal school. The earlier institutions established under the Public Libraries Acts were greatly hindered in their work by the fact that so many of the citizens were unable to read at all, and so many more were imperfectly equipped for benefiting by books that needed serious and systematic attention. This state of things has happily, to a large extent, passed away, and the library is now able to exert to the full its educational as well as its recreative functions.

This slight glance at the past explains the isolation in which the public libraries stand in relation to the other public institutions of education and learning, and also in relation to each other. Is it possible to bring these libraries into closer contact, and to fit them into the general educational system? Various suggestions have been made. Mr. Edward Edwards advocated a system of State inspection. It cannot be said that his suggestion was received very cordially, although it has some obvious advantages. Our French friends, with their logical faculty and passion for symmetry, have long ago adopted this method. When the French Government pays the whole or a part of the cost of a book of science or art, it causes copies to be distributed amongst the libraries of Paris and the departments. A system of inspection would make much useful experience generally available. It could not injure the efficient, and it might provide stimulation where that is needed. Moreover, a central bureau might be of service in the provision of mode forms and in effecting some economy in the present expenditure of energy and money in cataloguing.

Mr. Justin Winsor, in the *Atlantic Monthly* of June, 1893, gives an interesting account of the operations of the Société Franklin, of Paris, which, by "judicious paternal supervision over a large circle of dependent libraries" affords to each of them "many advantages both financial and administrative." The Société Franklin is, of course, a voluntary association, but its experience shows that there are certain definite and weighty advantages to be obtained by combined action and central control. That there are disadvantages also no one will care to deny. The question to be decided is whether the advantages which leave each library a small republic are greater than those to be obtained by a rough federation with some central supervision. Still better, is it not possible to combine the benefits of both systems, as we endeavour to do in relation to elementary education?

So far as the smaller towns and villages are concerned, it would seem to be obviously appropriate to place the library and the school-house together. Comparatively little has yet been done in this country in the provision of school libraries, although their establishment is possible under the Education Acts. In Leeds, as is well known, the library authorities have by arrangement with the School Board established many small libraries in the school-houses of different districts. France has developed an important system of school libraries.

It is beyond the financial power of the villages to establish public libraries of great size and importance, but an adaptation of the French plan would be possible, and even a small collection of good and readable books would help to stir the quiet depths of rural life. The County Councils might help by the formation of travelling libraries to go the rounds of the parishes under their rule.

In the same paper Mr. Justin Winsor says, "The action of the State of Massachusetts a year or two ago in creating a library commission, and committing to a small body of selected men and women the task of fostering local libraries, opens a new era in the history of such institutions." There is nothing analogous to this in England. Even the Council of Education, foreshadowed as long ago as 1869, has not emerged into being. Some of the urban libraries have become closely allied with secondary education by the establishment of technical classes of various kinds, and by co-operation in university extension.

There is not in England any direct connection (save, exceptionally, between town libraries and the colleges), and universities providing secondary and higher education. But an experiment on a somewhat considerable scale is being tried in the State of New York, under the impulse of our valued member, Mr. Melvil Dewey. The American system of higher education is a good deal misunderstood in this country, where the great services it has rendered are too often ignored. This arises partly from the meanings attached to words, familiar to us with other significations. An American University differs from an English University just as this differs from a German University, or from the *Université de France*. The "University of Harvard College" is the official style of one of the finest homes of learning in the world, and it fulfils the duties both of a college and a university. But if some colleges are universities, some universities are colleges, and some are not more than

academies of secondary education. The work they have done is that of bringing higher education within easy reach of the people. The path of the poor but clever American boy and girl from the township school to the local college, and to the State University, is a good deal easier than that which has to be traversed in England. The University of the State of New York is 107 years old, and its constitution was last amended in 1889. The University consists of all incorporated institutions of academic and higher education, with the State library, State museum, and such other libraries, museums, or other institutions for higher education in the State, as may be admitted by the regents to the University. Its object is, in all proper ways to encourage and promote academic and higher education.

Besides the State library and State museum, there are in the University 383 institutions. These consist of 91 academies, 230 high schools, and 62 colleges, not counting theological schools. Of the degree-conferring institutions, 17 are colleges of arts and sciences for men, seven for women, and four for men and women, six law schools, 16 medical schools, three schools of pharmacy, and nine polytechnic and special institutions.

The powers of the University are vested in 23 regents, including the Governor, Lieutenant-Governor, Secretary of State, and Superintendent of Public Instruction, *ex-officio*. Regents are elected in the same manner as senators of the United States, and serve without salary. The regents have power to incorporate and to alter or repeal the charters of colleges, academies, libraries, museums, or other educational institutions belonging to the University ; to distribute to them all funds granted by the State for their use ; to inspect their workings, and require annual reports under oath of their presiding officers ; to establish examinations as to attainments in learning, and confer on successful candidates suitable certificates, diplomas and degrees, and to confer honorary degrees. They apportion annually an academic fund of \$106,000, a part of which is devoted to buying books and apparatus for academies and high schools raising an equal amount for the same purpose, and the remainder is applied in payments made on the basis of attendance and of the regents' examinations.

This is, of course, a mere outline of the constitution of this unique "Supervisory University." Its constitution enables it to give a definite position to public libraries, and it recognises their formation and encouragement as part of the work expected

from it by the Legislature. Thus in the Commonwealth of New York the State Library—it is there where Professor Dewey carries out his excellent idea of a school of library economy—and the State Museum are integral parts of the State University, and a library fulfilling certain conditions and attaining to a certain standard is admitted as a member of the University, entitled to the advantages dispensed by the regents, and to representation in Convocation.

Are there in these experiments and experiences hints that may be helpful in determining the place of our libraries in a general educational system when England, that has halted so long, shall finally decide to complete and perfect her educational system? Those who believe in the public library as the “people’s university,” should consider the matter in good time. The English town libraries touch education at every point, and have a relation, more or less close, to primary, secondary and higher instruction. Can their organisation for educational purposes be improved? Can they without loss of anything valuable, be authoritatively classified and hall-marked, so to speak? Can they, not as a figure of speech, but in actual fact, have a definite place assigned to them in the hierarchy of educational institutions—a position that will correspond to the services which all can, and many do, render to every department of the education of the nation? And in that case, would not all public libraries and museums rendering such services, be entitled to share in such advantages as the State may, from time to time, be able to assign to educational institutions? I end as I began, by saying that these are not matters for off-hand judgment, but for the careful and thoughtful consideration of those who are fully convinced of the great work which the public library—the “people’s university”—has done, and is doing, in stimulating and deepening the intellectual life of the English nation.

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