

21 Feb 1906 cont'd

Queen Elizabeth was urged by her archbishop and Sir Humphrey Gilbert to establish a library to be the Great National Library, "after the pattern of the more civilized nations, France, Germany and Italy."—Though the virgin queen had some love of learning, she was not destined to add to her other glories that of being the founder of a national library. Roger Ascham was librarian of the Royal library. The original foundation of the British museum was made up of four separate collections: The Royal, the Cottonian, the Earl of Oxford's and the Hans Sloane's. Sir Robert Bruce Cotton was an enthusiastic collector of the seventeenth century. He spent his life in gathering from all parts of the world material for his library and museum. After his death it was added to by his son, and in 1700 it was presented to the nation by his grandson. There was no suitable place for this collection until forty years later.

The books and manuscripts which the first Earl of Oxford collected were among the glories of their age and in them the family name will never die. It is known as the Harleian collection.

But not an English King, nor Robert Cotton, nor the Earl of Oxford has so good a claim to be regarded as the founder of the British museum as has Sir Hans Sloane.

He was a successful physician with a passion for collecting rare manuscripts, prints, medals, coins and the like. At his death he bequeathed his collection, the most unique and extensive private collection in the world, to the nation, on condition that Parliament should pay his debts which amounted to much less than the value of the collection. In his will appears a beautiful dedication of the fruits of his life's work to the public good.

So the British museum is founded in 1757 by bringing together these four notable collections. It now ranks in importance before all the great libraries of the world, except the Nationale at Paris, and far excels the latter in its systematic arrangement and the accessibility of its resources.

On its forty miles of shelving are more than two million volumes. Nineteen hundred newspapers are received, filed and bound.

Only two libraries in the United States have so fine a collection of our national history and literature.

It possesses the best library in any European language outside the territory in which the language is the vernacular. It has had a list of distinguished librarians, but it was while in the charge of Sir Andrew Panizzi that it passed from the old ways into the new.

In 1837 he entered on his duties and began at once a system of modern administration which revolutionized not only the library, but also the English ideas of what a library should be.

As his name indicates, he was not altogether English, or he would never have admitted, as he did admit, that his own progressive ideas came to him from America. "Englishment teach the world how to live," but the librarian of the British museum did not hesitate to adopt American methods. He made the English realize that books were for service, and that the good of the nation demanded the diffusion of learning.

Sir Thomas Bradley, founder of the celebrated Bodleian Library builded better than he knew, when in 1602 he concluded "to set up his staff at the library door of Oxon." He is the interesting prototype of a large number of benefactors of the human race. Wiser than many who have followed him, he began in his lifetime his philanthropical work, and at his death left property for the maintenance and increase of the library. The number of books and manuscripts is half a million, but this conveys an inadequate idea of the valuable character of the collection.

Superior in Oriental manuscript to any other library, its editions in editions principes in Greek and Latin are well nigh priceless.

The old systems of education were completely revolutionized by the invention of printing late in the fifteenth century.

Students of ages ago walked hundreds of miles, perhaps begging their way, to sit within sound of the voice of some chosen teacher, or to read some book securely chained to a pillar.

The wisdom and learning which had to be sought out with infinite labor is printed and made accessible to the poorest corner. The early libraries we have seen to be but storehouses. To get and to keep were their chief functions, while to use was subordinate. Then a broadening process began, and the next article will have to do with the awakening which began in America.