

# The Library in the Liberal Arts College<sup>1</sup>

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WE ARE COME TOGETHER today to celebrate an unusually happy occasion: the dedication of a library building. It is an occasion of moment when an amalgam of mortar and steel becomes a building and is readied for its ultimate function. It is an occasion of great moment when that function is the housing of a library in a liberal arts college. The significance of a library is not to be underestimated even in these days of earth-shaking explosions. We are all devoted to the college and acknowledge by our continued support that it performs a vital and necessary role. In the last hundred years the library has been accepted as the most essential feature of the university. The library in the college is an equal necessity for we recognize that a liberal arts college is particularly reliant upon its library. The more a college utilizes its library the more nearly is the college—and the library—fulfilling the contract we should like to have observed.

This moment of dedication gives us the opportunity to reflect, for in this period of creation it is fitting and appropriate to consider this building's purpose and to consider what is implied. By our presence we tacitly approve of such a monument to the past. But is this the extent of our consent? A library is much more than a monument to the past—it is a fortress

erected against the forces of barbarism. There are traditional rites of spring and it may be more than a coincidence that we are now celebrating the permanence of certain elements of our heritage. Hereby we make pertinent materials easily available for their periodic consideration in the annual progression of higher education.

Finley Peter Dunne in his role of gadfly to the American public had Mr. Dooley say "Books is for them that can't enjoy themselves any other way." Now libraries are primarily devoted to books and an increase in the building of libraries would appear to indicate that many Americans want to enjoy themselves and instruct themselves through the particular medium of books. I remember hearing Norman Thomas reminisce about his public career that has extended over a generous part of this twentieth century. When visiting college and university campuses in the twenties, he was invariably shown the newly-erected football stadium but the usual answer to his question about the library was, "It's over there, somewhere." It is encouraging now to recognize a new trend, to know that many university libraries have been completed in very recent years such as the Firestone Library at Princeton, the Lamont Undergraduate Library at Harvard, and the libraries of the University of Georgia, the University of Wisconsin, Iowa, and Oklahoma.

Americans always have believed that libraries were important. Ever since learning was taken out of the monasteries

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by the discovery of the art of printing, there has been a continuing tradition of books flowing to America. The conquistadors brought many, many books to the New World and their influence may be deduced from nearly a century of printing in Central and South America prior to the first printing within what are now the United States. Stephen Daye's press in Cambridge, Mass., produced our first book, *The Bay Psalm Book*, in 1640. Harvard College had foreseen its educational responsibility by bringing that press to America. The famous Dr. Bray's "Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts" was instrumental in sending many useful books to the colonists. Most of the New England divines such as the Mathers, both Cotton and Increase, and Jonathan Edwards, were users and creators of books. Thomas Prince, pastor of the Old South Church, was the greatest of American eighteenth-century collectors in the north while William Byrd II of Westover began collecting an unusual library in Virginia before the end of the seventeenth century.

Benjamin Franklin and Thomas Jefferson were both concerned with building personal libraries and Jefferson's books made the foundation of our present Library of Congress after the burning of Washington by the British in the War of 1812. There were distinguished book collectors in the nineteenth century such as Peter Force (whose great collection of Americana is now in the Library of Congress), James Lenox (whose distinguished collection now makes up part of the New York Public Library) and John Carter Brown (whose library is presently a part of Brown University). The great public library movement of the nineteenth century brought fine treasures to these shores in addition to preserving those books already rare which were published in America. Philanthro-

pists such as J. J. Astor, George Peabody, and Joshua Bates were convinced of these ideals and supported them by large financial grants. Librarians like Joseph Cogswell, creator of the Astor, later the New York Public Library, Charles Jewett of the Smithsonian, and William Poole of the Boston Athenaeum were particularly influential and built great book collections wisely and well. Historians Jared Sparks, George Bancroft, and George Ticknor all furthered this most significant movement in America. Public tax support soon assured that the library was an essential part of the city, considered with the schools as desirable in our democratic life. In 1850 there were less than 800 public libraries in the United States, but in the next twenty-five years 2,240 new public libraries were founded. Today we take for granted this free supply of books when scarcely more than a century ago men like Lincoln would have given good labor for the privilege of reading books in the possession of a more fortunate man.

In the college the library is of utmost importance. If such is not the case, examination of the teaching philosophy may reveal rusty techniques and outmoded loyalties. Some faculty may be disturbed by an inferiority complex in regard to library materials, or even the written word, which can result in a frightful scar for those students subjected to such vagaries, or false standards. The library in the college is more than an adjunct to teaching, it is the common source from which both student and professor draw sustenance. It is an ever flowing fountain, or one may prefer the figure the London bookdealer Henry Stevens of Vermont used. In writing to the historian John Fiske he said, "*The Tree of Knowledge* grows now in the Centre of the Reading Room of the British Museum in a huge pot. You have only

to shake it and down the ripe fruit drops." Through the college library, student and professor engage together in an imaginative exploration of the past toward a search for truth. The student begins to develop some critical intelligence as he finds that he too may draw freely upon this bountiful source to confound his classmates and delight his professors. The materials are fully and impartially available to all; the use one makes of them depends entirely upon the mental equipment one brings.

There was the southern newspaper editor who conducted a contest to discover the book that had most influence upon his readers. The contest was won by a college student whose answer embraced two books with bipartisan practicality. The prize answer was: The books that have helped me most are my mother's cookbook and my father's checkbook. This may not be as far away from the essence of libraries as one might think. It shows that different people go to books for various things. Those interested in the trades go to books for specific facts and tool knowledge. Some go to libraries for amusement and relaxation. One goes to books to find out the nature of society. Many go to literature that it may reveal to them some insight into human nature. From this, the fortunate realize the ultimate, which is self-knowledge. The study of man has continually intrigued man through the ages. There can be no deeper satisfaction than an appreciation of the workings of man's mind with the concomitant recognition of the forces which motivate thinking man. Through a library one can achieve a perspective from the selected concentration of the past. The educated man, through a knowledge of the past, has an insight into the present, thus gaining wisdom which is essential to project a livable future.

The college student who learns to use

the library intelligently has made great strides toward his ultimate adjustment with life. Not only has he acquired the key to his major source or fund of workable material but also he has achieved a skill which must stand him in good stead for the rest of his life either in work or in constructive play. No one after graduation can afford to neglect the library, representing as it does, the wealth of ideas and fact accumulated out of our past. Nor can anyone assume that the progression of interpretation and evolving techniques will cease when the individual has received that tentative seal of approval granted along with his higher degree. Flukes of fortune will occur but for certain good repute the well-grounded individual will ever be justified. One recalls that President Rutherford B. Hayes attended college not far from this campus. While still an undergraduate he gained a reputation as a reader well informed on politics. This study he continued through his adult life gaining always in wisdom and contentment. Surely his administration profited from his background while his personal life reflected the happiness of a mature and enlightened beneficence. Even in college he recognized that "the observing scholar . . . learned that patient labor is the condition of success." In his valedictory speech at Kenyon College in 1842 he took special note of the library, saying with affection, "For solitary enjoyment, in our libraries we have all the stores of learning, wisdom, and wit that heart could desire." He found, what all of us must one day discover, that man essentially is alone in this world, and Hayes early recognized the great solace individual man could derive from a library. There one associates with the greatest minds of all time. Through the unobtrusive medium of books one can aspire to gain any friendship one desires—for there is infinite

variety, so that no matter what one's bias or eccentricity or even aberration, it is possible to find a soul who has been there before. Best of all, one receives counsel and, as a result of the communion with finer minds, oneself grows in stature, wisdom, and humanity. It is a chastening experience to strive thus to enter into a kind of exchange of ideas with great thinkers and, for this reason genuine scholars are humble people. There is a wealth of satisfaction in being able to achieve this plane of communication which can be reached through patient research and mental discipline. This is no psychic experience but the elevation or education of a good mind to a point where it can understand and interpret the ideas and logic of famous intellects.

When the student begins to make a library serve his own ends, he finds that his techniques are sharpened and his mind is toughened. This will be a stretch for an untried mind but, granted the self-discipline and the tenacity to unravel conflicting texts, there will come a glimmer of the real nature of truth. Edna St. Vincent Millay has described this vividly in one of her sonnets:

Euclid alone  
Has looked on Beauty bare. Fortunate they  
Who, though once only and then but far away,  
Have heard her massive sandal set on stone.

A genuine excitement, one of the most valid and satisfactory of a college career, occurs when the student becomes truly conscious of the possibilities of his college library. Through such an insight the individual may become aware of his own awakening abilities and may be granted a recognition of the actual potential within himself. It is a heady feeling to know that one's professors and classmates, from the same sources, may have deduced unjustified conclusions either through lack of

research or by infatuation with a prejudice. When this new-found power of scholarship is tempered by tolerance and courtesy, one indeed has entered into a golden company.

Important likewise in college are the many peripheral interests which may be discovered by the alert student who is wise enough to take advantage of the library's resources. One thinks of those rich and romantic engravings of the ancient monuments of Rome by Piranesi that may lead a curious student to an exploration of the civilizations of antiquity, or to an understanding of the processes used in the graphic arts. Caricatures by Max Beerbohm may provoke a closer study of nineteenth-century literary personages whose foibles are so cleverly epitomized, or to a discovery of the great names in caricature from Goya, Garvani and Daumier to our contemporary David Low, or to an appreciation of the impact that the cartoon can exert. An eighteenth-century edition of Boswell may induce an interest in Johnson, or in the art of biography, or to an investigation of eighteenth-century life through the recently discovered Malahide Papers. An early Shakespeare folio might lead another to a study of book rarities, or to some understanding of the process of printing plays in the seventeenth century. By following any likely progression the student has revealed to him what Kenneth Grahame describes as "the wide wonder of the world." Surely such an awakening will broaden the student and enrich the man. Thereafter comes the discovery that information gleaned in this fashion is not so tangential after all, and it may become quite central to a phase of one's career. This approach to a total education is well described in the early chapters of Lincoln Steffens' *Autobiography*. Jack London has created a powerful novel, *Martin Eden*, as the result of his own conversion to this

world of knowledge.

The establishment of a library creates continuing obligations for the entire institution. The effort does not cease with the completion of an edifice to house books. The library must be adequately maintained, staffed, and stocked. The maintenance department understands well that the building must be heated, and cleaned, and kept in good repair. Your president recognizes that the library staff is most important to the whole college and that sympathetic trained librarians perform a great service in guiding and teaching young minds in their tentative approaches to this storehouse of knowledge. The members of the faculty too are cognizant that upon them depends the effective use that the students make of the library. The devoted and curious teacher can make his own curiosity contagious to students and thus may skilfully induce them along this voluntary and painless path of library investigation.

The book collection is of paramount importance. Not only must it be carefully chosen for that which is central to our cultural heritage, but it must also be continually refreshed for the ever-changing present. No working library can fulfill its proper function without continuous replenishment. New books are vital to the existence of the library, while the less important and outmoded texts must be weeded to accommodate the newer books. Thus a central core of readable and essential material is maintained. It is the special charge of the librarians and faculty to guard this balance: to choose the best of the new books, and to insure that older texts pertinent to current philosophies are present. The Board of Trustees and the alumni have a particular responsibility to see that adequate funds are available for this purpose. It is a great pleasure to note that already some special funds have been

collected for this library, indicating that such cooperation is well under way. To insure that the library properly functions in its assigned role in the college, friends of the library help by giving the best editions of recognized classics, and by presenting certain rare books which enrich the library holdings and increase the delight that most patrons take in the library. The Boston Public Library was only a project on paper in 1852 when Joshua Bates, one of the richest Americans in London, looked over the supporting documents that the City of Boston submitted to Baring Brothers in applying for a water loan. His imagination was so fired by this concept of a library that he offered \$50,000 for books if the city would erect a suitable building. As a youth in Boston he had been allowed to sit in a bookshop evenings and read from its stock when he could afford neither books nor a fire to warm his own room. Later he gave another \$50,000 to make the book fund more stable. This same generous tradition has been reinforced in the last few years by an immigrant fruit vendor. He was so intrigued by the businessmen who bought from his baskets at night that he began to use the Boston Public Library to inform himself about investments. He proved to have such a gift with real estate that he presented the library with a million dollars and has provided that another million will result from his original gift.

There is yet a higher obligation that may be exacted from the patrons of the library. The creation of such an important foundation imposes responsibilities upon everyone connected with it. If we expect to find all knowledge at our fingertips here, we must be ever vigilant to see that there is always ready access to this treasure house. We wish the freedom to explore all kinds of philosophies and to investigate all types of

cultures. We have been enormously enriched by contributions made from widely divergent cultures such as those of Greece, Asia Minor, Peru, and Scandinavia. In music and art, in philosophy and literature, in politics and science, we are the fortunate recipients of centuries of experimentation and discovery by both the greatest genius and the everyday, common man. Our democracy prides itself on its fluidity and its adaptability. We must continue to keep viable, and to do this we must be able to analyze new ideas. We must be able to recognize good, and to see evil; only careful study, not blind prejudice, can give this desirable result. We can discover weakness only by intimate knowledge and only intelligently can we fight the strong and good battle. There are those vocal in these days who would lock up portions of our libraries, because they contain foreign ideas. There are misguided super-patriots who would solidify our political ideas, so they could never be improved, not recognizing that our ideals of political and social standards have changed drastically since we first set up business in 1783.

Dr. Grayson Kirk in his first public address as president of Columbia said:

A great university must always be on guard against efforts in the free world to limit free thought. If our beliefs cannot withstand the test of honest criticism, if we cannot safely permit the examination of certain ideas because we think they are dangerous, then we are little better off than those we condemn and oppose . . . It is the glory of our civilization that it rests upon the conviction that enlightenment and progress can only exist in an atmosphere of freedom.

Life in America has been a sweet thing in the past. America has been an open and true haven for the oppressed during the terrible years of this first half of the twentieth century. Are we now going to

turn away from freedom and the freedom of investigation, through which we have drawn our tremendous strength and even more tremendous power, the like of which this world has never before hardly even imagined? Are we going now to fall victim to the demagogues and the dealers in half-truths who would lock up the truth and order us to think as they do? It is our duty to protect our freedom of inquiry which ultimately is the true strength of America and the American ideal of democracy. It means we must fight in our own country for freedom, and be ever vigilant against the phony politicians, and be ready to stand up and be counted for our convictions when the need arises.

In the college this means teaching the truth as we see it to the best of our abilities in order to give the students, particularly in the liberal arts colleges, a wisely selected foundation upon which to base decisions. Students must be induced to think straight and hard and to have the courage of the true and right conviction. Today as never before, forces of incredible magnitude are loosed upon us. We must control these monsters and to do so takes great strength and great wisdom. We must make the correct decisions and make these judgments for humanity, for we are now in the key position of gravest responsibility for the entire world. Students from liberal arts colleges must have the sanity and balance to tackle these decisions, for they are the ones we educate in the broad and humane tradition. They are not specialists, their knowledge is of man and his term in this world. This college generation must have the humanistic and religious training to visualize the best kind of world, and to bend our legislation toward the end, where the dignity of man is paramount. Toward this goal the library in the liberal arts college is dedicated.