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COLLECTORS AND COLLECTING

THE ANNUAL ADDRESS
Before the Maine Press Association, at its Meeting in the Senate Chamber, State House, Augusta, Jan. 29, 1901

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When I had the honor of addressing this Association at its Portland meeting a few years since, I chose for a subject one somewhat aside from the usual trend of those taken by previous speakers, and yet having a definite appropriateness to the duties of the working editor. Again, before choosing my present subject, I went carefully over the published proceedings of our Association and found that almost every theme connected with the historical, literary, technical and business sides of journalism had been ably treated in the past by the best informed members of the Maine newspaper guild. For we have had great editors even in Maine—Luther Severance, Charles Holden, Ezekiel Holmes, William A. Drew, Edward H. Elwell, William H. Simpson, Hobart W. Richardson, William T. Johnson, John L. Stevens, Nelson Dingley, James G. Blaine. And we have had, too, great business managers—William Noyes, John H. Lynde, Russell Eaton, Brown Thurston, John L. Sayward, William R. Smith, Benjamin A. Burr, John M. Adams, Millard E. Mudgett. When you recall these men, some of whom have addressed this Association in the past, could it be expected of me to enlighten or entertain you? As for enlightenment, the metropolitan papers during the past few months, which all of you have read, have been filled with formulas for making the ideal newspaper; as to entertainment, have you not had those feats in journalistic pyrotechnics displayed by Rev. Mr. Sheldon, Dr. Joseph Parker and Alfred Harmsworth? After such examples, what is there for me to tell you? Hence, in again turning somewhat away from topics related to the technical making of newspapers, in the choice of a subject for the afternoon, may I not hope that what I have to say will possess some interest for a few, at least, of those who hear me.

The newspaper, the magazine and the book are closely related—the former often expand into the latter. Books of entertainment and books of positive literature are made up from articles and treatises that have first appeared in newspaper columns and magazine pages. This is true in Maine as elsewhere. Mr. Elwell’s “Fraternity Papers” and “Boys of ’35” grew out of Transcript articles. Here in the capital city do we not tarry “Under Friendly Eaves” with Miss Dana;
or glide over pleasant waters behind "White Sails" with Emma Huntington Nason? If we go east, Mrs. Rowe relates "Thrice Told Tales of the Woods and Coast of Maine;" or up among the Franklin hills and Julia May sings us songs of the Pine Tree State. We are never weary of jolly days "Up in Maine," and long for spring to come when the banker-poet down in Rockland, who is Fuller of genuine cleverness than any six editors west of Bangor, is to tell us "What Happened to Wigglesworth." And so I might go on—naming many books by Maine authors gathered from newspaper columns. From the book to the library the succession is natural—for the library of the newspaper editor has frequently grown into the vast collection of the public association, as the great collection of the American Antiquarian Society in Worcester has grown from the small library left it by Isaiah Thomas, one of the early newspaper printers of Massachusetts; while many of our great public libraries have often had their beginnings in the collection of some quiet scholar, literary worker or book-lover, or in the reading club of a little circle of cultivated women. Not to mention the vast libraries of England, like that of the British Museum, which originated in the private library of Sir Joseph Banks, or that of Oxford University, in the collection of Sir Thomas Bodley—how many are the great public and university libraries of our own country that have been indebted to the collections of private individuals for their inception or their increase. After the burning of the library of Congress by the British in 1814, it was the private library of Thomas Jefferson—the books of which made eighteen heavy wagon loads—that laid the foundation of our new national library, now housed in that palace east of the capitol in Washington, which is the most magnificent library building in the world. That collection has been further increased by the rich private collections of Peter Force, and of the first historian of the United States, George Bancroft. How the Boston public library has been enriched by the private collections of book-lovers and students like Joshua Bates, George Ticknor, Edward Everett, Theodore Parker, Thomas P. Barton and Mellen Chamberlain. What magnificent collections, hundreds of thousands of volumes each, have been gathered by H. H. Bancroft and Adolf Sutro of California—collections almost sure in the future to go to some magnificent public library. The splendid collection of ten thousand volumes, built up slowly, book upon book, by George P. Marsh, gives distinction and character to the University of Vermont. And so I might go on—mentioning the ninety-three noble libraries and art galleries established in so many places in this country and in Great Britain by Andrew Carnegie—a poor boy who loved to read but was denied the aid of books, now the multi-millionaire builder of free libraries, and most eminent
individual benefactor of learning of the century—whose gifts to
this object alone aggregate more than $5,000,000, and whom Augusta
and Lewiston will remember with gratitude among other donors
to their libraries; by Walter Newberry and John Crerar in Chicago;
by David Watkinson in Hartford; by George Peabody in Baltimore;
by Frederick Rindge in Cambridge; by the Astors, Tildens and
Lenoxs in New York—with scores upon scores of other private
benefactors, all over the land, who have built magnificent buildings
and filled them with books for the free use of everybody. In
our own State there are the conspicuous examples of Mr. Baxter
in Portland; the Washburns in Livermore; Abner Coburn in Skow­
hegan; Nathaniel Wilson and Paul Richards Hazeltine in Belfast;
Mr. Abbott in Dexter; Mr. Brown in Clinton; Dr. Thompson in
Dover; Mr. Hersey in Bangor; Mr. Moses in Bath; Mr. Lithgow in
Augusta; Mr. Pike in Calais; Mr. Buck in Bucksport; Mr. Stewart
in Corinna; Mr. Cumston in Monmouth; Mr. Peavy in Eastport;
Mr. Porter in Machias—but I might as well stop although the list is
far from complete. Aside from these how many are the instances
among our own people, of smaller but creditable public libraries
which owe their existence, not only for buildings but for the books,
which are the soul of the library within the building as the soul of
man is within the body—to the earnest, quiet work of some small
circle of intelligent women who realized what such a library means
for the culture and beauty of a community—of which that in the
sweet, quiet city of Hallowell, almost within sound of the voice,
surely within near sight—is a most conspicuous example.

Now the main thing in all this is the importance of the individual
work. Nations do not collect libraries; cities do not do it; nor do
great governments nor town authorities. Could the British nation
have done what Sir Joseph Banks did, could Congress have made
the Peter Force collection, could Boston have ever collected the
manuscripts which Mellen Chamberlain got together, or the unrivalled
Shakespearean collection of Thomas Barton? But the man kept on,
working upon a definite plan, adding volume to volume, year by
year, until his collection was purchased by the government or the
city to add to its intellectual treasure house; the enthusiastic women
kept on, year by year, holding entertainments, buying a few books,
ever becoming discouraged, until at last their work received recog­
nition, as all sincere, honest work is sure to do; and great is their
reward when some wealthy citizen builds upon the foundation they
have laid, and gives the town a beautiful building in which to hold
the literary treasures which they have heaped together. Were not
such the beginnings at Hallowell, at Bath, at Fairfield, at Farming­
ton, at Skowhegan and in other towns?
The fullest and most perfect conception of the uses and service of books is found in the free public library of the present day, of which there are coming to be so many fine examples in our own State. At the world’s fair, in Chicago, there was on exhibition a most unique map of Massachusetts, which was the work of the library commission of that State. It was a library map. Every town in the State in which was a free public library was represented on that map by an open book, and there were but fourteen towns in the State that had not such a library in 1893. Were the map to be made to-day it would have an open book resting upon the name of every town save three. Maine can make no such showing as that. But it is a thing to rejoice over, that there are in Maine to-day seventy-two public libraries, of which number, at least, twenty-six are housed in beautiful buildings of their own. Within the past year three such buildings have been erected, and at this very hour work is being carried on upon three others—in Alfred by the Messrs. Parsons; in Farmington by the Cutler brothers; and in Fairfield by Edward J. Lawrence.

Victor Hugo, speaking of France, said that whoever opened a school closed a prison. With how much greater truth, and as teaching a wider lesson, may it be said to-day, that whosoever opens a free public library and reading-room, not only closes a prison, but closes that which feeds the prison with human souls—the bar room, drinking saloon and low village lounging place—for it stops the making of material which fills jails and prisons, transforming it into intelligent, manly, industrious men, fitted for the honorable business activities of life. Along the village street of many a Maine town stands the three supreme agencies of education, culture and Christianity—the schoolhouse, the church and the free public library, and towns can do for the library what they cannot for the church, lay a tax upon the people for its support. And I love to think that through the generous benevolence of so many of our wealthy men the boys in these villages can go down to the library in the long winter evenings and, sitting in these cheerful, finely appointed reading-rooms, pass the hours which might otherwise have been given up to lounging at the corner saloon or grocery, in company with a wealth of books and magazines—those quiet, unobtrusive, unconscious teachers of good, which these libraries hold for those willing to use them.

But the library must begin with the collector, and the collector must possess in a degree fitted for his work the spirit or inspiration within. In other words, he must possess the particular kind of mental persistence which takes the form of a mania or disease. The bibliomania must be in the blood. It is not easy to say how it gets there, or how it is developed; we only know that it is a certain kind
of enthusiasm, which, within judicious lines, is noble and commendable, for nothing great in this world has ever been achieved without direct personal enthusiasm wisely directed. Unbridled, the collecting disease goes little beyond the questionable dignity of a fad. But, however it may be, for one reason or another a great many persons enjoy the collecting habit. They make collections of buttons, pipes, snuff-boxes, butterflies, cigar tags, wine corks, postage stamps. These diversions we call "hobbies," and those who indulge in them are "cranks." The higher and more worthy mania—while not despising any one of these which contributes to human knowledge—that of book and print collecting, is to be encouraged and promoted, for when wisely directed its every aim and end tends to culture, personal enjoyment, intellectual finish, and generally to the public good. For with how many of the great free public libraries of to-day may we not trace back their beginnings to the small, modestly-growing collection of some obscure student, who, year by year getting a little library about him, built—not better than he knew, but because he knew—and hence better than his contemporaries knew or even suspected.

At the outset the person who thinks of making a collection of books should have a well-defined idea of the particular line in which he should collect, or the field he is to occupy and conquer. But he must not undertake to make a general library. Life is not long enough, nor is the purse of the ordinary book-lover sufficiently long or sufficiently well filled. In the old days book collecting embraced the formation of a library of general literature, books which, in the wording of the old advertisements, "no gentleman's library should be without," of which the famous library of the late Thomas Dowse, the "learned leather dresser" of Cambridge, now in possession of the Massachusetts Historical Society, is probably the best example. And about this library and its founder an interesting incident may be related. Mr. Dowse was a leather dresser, but had a great love for books and art. He had a tanner's shop in the university town, over the entrance to which was the sign of a gilded lamb, and during many years few knew that he was a book collector and possessed a remarkable library. He had made a will bequeathing his books to the library of Harvard University. One night some Harvard students, out on a lark, tore down his sign and carried it off. That induced him to change his will and he left it instead to the Massachusetts Historical Society. It is a splendid collection of 4,650 volumes, all fine editions and in elegant bindings, magnificently housed in the society's new building in the Back Bay district of Boston, and I do not go there that I do not visit it to look at the books and see the
sweet, kindly face of Mr. Dowse as it looks down to the visitor from
the admirable oil painting by Wright.

In the multiplicity of books and the vast expansion of knowledge
into numberless specialties, such a thing as a general library is now
simply impossible. The person may want an occasional book to
read—he can obtain it at the libraries. What he buys should be in
accordance with a seriously-considered plan from which there should
be few if any deviations. The scheme should be a specialty, the aim
should never be diverted.

Well, within the specialty what shall be the choice? This must
be in accordance with one's loves and desires, guided by the aid of
bibliography and an understanding survey of the world of books.
There is always open the subject of local history, which takes first
the study of one's native State. If one is to take Maine as his spec-
alty in collecting, what of the task and its fulfillment? Let us see.
Williamson's Bibliography of Maine, a magnificent, monumental
work the like of which hardly exists in any other State, enumerates a
total of 11,032 titles in its two noble volumes. And there is some-
thing about the making of this great work, not generally known, that
is worth telling. The compilation, arrangement and preparation for
the press of this work of over 1400 closely-printed pages was accom-
plished by using just one hour of time per day. After work at his
office, the hour between eight and nine o'clock every evening at
home, until it was completed, was devoted to this one task, and see
the result! Yet men are constantly saying, "I have no time." Of
course no one starting out to make a Maine collection can hope to
obtain 11,032 titles. But I estimate that a person to be fairly well
satisfied with his collection would need to possess at least 2500 titles;
and it would require from $8000 to $10,000 to make it. Even then it
might be wanting one hundred priceless things which the collector
would make up his mind never to get for love or money, simply
because the day for getting them has gone by. Just glance at the
mere outlines of what a Maine collection would embrace: Beginning
with Williamson's Bibliography, there are the Jesuit Relations, Charle-
voix's New France, Champlain's Voyages to the Maine Coast and
the histories of Sullivan, Williamson (both editions), Coolidge and
Mansfield, Abbott and Ellwell and Varney; the works of Greenleaf,
with the atlas of views and map; all the county histories, atlases
and maps; the collections of the Maine and Massachusetts Historical
Societies; all the town histories; the histories of Maine regiments
in the Civil War; biographies of Maine people and all books of
Maine authors; the rare early volumes relating to the courts and the
churches; the American and Parliamentary papers relating to the
Webster-Ashburton treaty; documents relating to the Plymouth and
Pt·jepscott patents and all pamphlets relating to the early land titles of the State; everything relating to our colleges; reports on the geological surveys of 1835-37 and 1861-62; the rare old pamphlets like Hannah Weston, Calais and Kennebunk, Scenes from a Vestry and the History of Fort Western; autograph letters or signed papers of all the governors, presidents of the Senate and speakers of the House of Representatives; a set of the public documents and of the several historical and genealogical magazines that have at different times been published in the State, and a complete set of the Maine Farmer's Almanac, comprising eighty-four numbers.

To have an idea of what such a collection would embrace, take a single subject: that of the northeastern boundary of the Webster-Ashburton treaty. A recent bulletin of the New York public library gave a bibliography of works upon this subject, contained in that library, which embraced forty-three maps published between 1609 and 1842, and a catalogue of 263 publications issued between 1755 and 1871. Does any one think it is an easy matter to make a collection on the local history of Maine? If one has plenty of time and money let him start out to make a Maine collection and see how long it will take him and how often he will have to draw his check for quite large sums before it is finished.

But if one does not have a fondness for local history, there are numberless subjects that may be taken. Among these are: The history of printing with bibliography and libraries; Shakespeare; Shelley; Poe; Washington; the Civil War; Bunyan and his works; the drama; American archaeology; Napoleon; painting and the fine arts; illustrated works; family history; economics; the Bible; John Ruskin; Omar Khayyam and the Rubaiyat; the arctic regions and north polar discovery; dictionaries; the fathers of the republic—Jefferson, Adams, Madison and Hamilton; electrical science; the pre-Raphaelites; Brook Farm; shipbuilding; issues of the Kelmscott press and books about William Morris, and generally all books issued from private presses and in limited editions. The collector can make no mistake in choosing such books, and the present is always a good time to begin.

Let us take two great representative personages. First, Shakespeare. The collection must not begin short of the first folio, printed in 1623. Of this 500 were supposed to have been printed, and during the past century 100 copies have been traced. Of these less than fifty are perfect, and 160 are known to have sustained serious damage. During the year 1897 three copies of the first folio came to America, one of which is owned by Martin J. Perry, of Providence, R. I. They are worth from $500 to $10,000 each. The famous library of Shakespearean literature collected by the late Thomas P. Barton, now in the
Boston public library, embraced a total of 3233 volumes when it was acquired by the library in 1870, after Mr. Barton's death; while the collection of Shakespearean books in the library aside from those in the Barton library is now more than twice as large as the Barton library. So that the Shakespearean books in that library alone number more than 10,000, and it would take $100,000 to now make such a collection.

Now take a typical American, Poe. Here one must begin with the first edition of Tamerlane—that weird, strange, unsatisfactory poem of only 243 lines, printed at Boston in a little pamphlet in 1827, when Poe was barely eighteen years of age. Three copies of this little pamphlet are known to be in existence, two of which are owned by Mr. F. R. Halsey, of New York, while one (which is without the cover) is in the library of the British Museum. The finest of the two American copies has had a most remarkable history. It came to public notice some years since and was sold by Dodd, Mead & Co. for $1850. It was again sold to Mr. Maxfield for the sum of $2200, who had it bound in most elaborate style at a cost of $300—one wonders in what it could have been bound to have cost that sum—and by him it was sold to the late Thomas J. McKee, of New York. At the sale of his library on November 23d, last, it again brought $2050. Speaking of Poe, let me say that the Boston public library possesses an exceedingly valuable Poe collection. This was enriched the past year by a collection of letters from and to Poe, given by Mrs. Griswold, of Bangor, which was simply priceless. There were in the collection nineteen letters written by Poe and between forty and fifty that were addressed to him. The Poe collection in the Boston public library is valued at $10,000. Another rare collection which has recently been presented to the Boston library is one relating to Walt Whitman. It consists of his works, together with portraits, sketches, letters, magazine articles and newspaper clippings to the number of about 300. The collection was made by an admirer of Whitman and given to the library. Thus do private collections which are liable to be destroyed or dispersed feed the larger libraries and become part of a permanent collection beyond the ordinary vicissitudes of change.

To make a collection of editions of Chaucer and the books relating to this supreme poet of the middle ages it would be necessary to spend from $50,000 to $100,000; while a Spenser collection could be obtained for something less. The greatest American, Daniel Webster, has been a favorite subject for many collectors. One of the finest Webster collections in the country is that in the Boston public library which consists of the different editions of his works and books about him with autograph letters—of which, however,
the collection embraces but eleven. To-day it would take $15,000, probably more, to make anything like a complete Webster collection.

In the early days of collecting one of the fancies of the collector was the inlaying and extra-illustrating or extending of books, but this hobby has now somewhat passed. There are two men in Boston who make a profession of this kind of business and even now find plenty of work, but it is done for the few wealthy collectors. The art of inlaying consists of inserting the printed page of a book into a sheet of larger size, so that the page has a wider margin. Some of the favorite books for inlaying have been Bancroft’s History of the United States, Irving’s Life of Washington, History of Nell Gwynn; books on the drama, Curtis’ Life of Webster, and the Bible. By the insertion of autographs, maps, and extra plates, works of one volume are often extended to four, and those of four or five to ten or fifteen. It was necessary to secure for this purpose copies of the volume to be extended in sheets, uncut, often in the large paper editions and then to add the extra plates or portraits. Many of these were often inlaid to a size of paper to correspond with the printed page, while art publishers issued portraits on paper of special size, expressly for this purpose. One of the notable examples of this kind of work was the copy of the Bible extended to thirty-two volumes, which was one of the rare lots in the magnificent library of the late Augustine Daley, and which sold for nearly $3000.

In the early days of collecting in this country one of the most famous of the extra-illustrated books was the copy of Irving’s Life of Washington, the large paper edition, made by the late John Russell Bartlett, of Providence, R. I. Every page of this edition, in five volumes, was inlaid to the size of elephant folio, in order to accommodate the large size of manuscripts and plates. Before the Revolution the prevailing size of the manuscripts used in documents and official correspondence was the large folio, and it was to receive such that this size was decided upon. It was extended to twenty-five volumes at a cost of $8000. When I was a boy I made several visits to Providence, and visited the celebrated library of John Carter Brown, of which Mr. Bartlett was the librarian. I saw in that famous library copies of the little pamphlets in which Columbus gave the first account of his discovery of the new world (soon after the invention of printing from movable type) and also this magnificent set of Irving’s Washington. This work is now in possession of Mr. Bartlett’s son, Commodore Bartlett of the United States Navy. Mr. Bartlett was one of the most industrious men whom I ever met. He knew no fatigue. Beside his duties as librarian of the Carter Brown library, of which he prepared a catalogue which was indeed a bibliography of early printing and rare Americana, which was printed in
four sumptuous volumes, he was for many years Secretary of State of Rhode Island, was the author of many important works including a bibliography of Rhode Island and a bibliography entitled "Literature of the Rebellion," and yet found time to make one of the largest collection of newspaper cuttings relating to the Civil War ever brought together. At the outbreak of the war he began to collect all the newspapers which published anything relating to the rebellion. He saved all the official orders, accounts of battles, soldiers' letters printed in the papers, all the illustrated papers, not only those published North, but in Great Britain, and all he could obtain from the South. He had orders out in all the brigades for the officers to secure for him Southern papers which were exchanged by soldiers along the picket lines. These were arranged in immense scrap books and made a collection of more than 200 volumes. Mr. Bartlett did not travel anywhere for years that he did not take the work of making these books with him. On steamboat or train he was always at work assorting and pasting these volumes. He had a portable outfit of folding table, with receptacles for cuttings, paste, brushes, etc., and never lost a moment on a journey, long or short, because he was always arranging and pasting his large books. Indeed it may with truth be said that Mr. Bartlett was the first press-clipping bureau in America. This wonderful collection on the Civil War was finally purchased by the Government at a large price and is now in the library of Congress.

The collecting of autographs was formerly one of the great hobbies of a few famous collectors, and there was a period back in the fifties and even down to the seventies when there were five very celebrated collections of autographs and manuscripts in this country. Their owners were Rev. Dr. William B. Sprague, of Albany; Charles I. Cist, of Cincinnati; J. K. Furlong, of Savannah; George W. Childs, of Philadelphia, and Gorham L. Ford, of New York. These early collectors had a great field from which to garner their harvest and they improved it well. Their collections went into the ten-thousand-dollar mark, and even above, in value. In the days when they were making their collections, letters of Washington and documents containing his signature could be purchased for from ten to fifty cents which would now bring from $50 to $200, while manuscript letters and documents of the Revolutionary period were almost as common as printed flyers are now, and almost as little esteemed. At first the autograph was cut from the letter or document and the body of the sheet discarded—it was the signature that was prized. Collectors did not seem to understand, what has since been learned, that the value of the manuscript is in its historical setting, and that the signature without the letter or document is valueless, as the document is with-
out the signature. Manuscript letters of eminent personages are just objects of pride in a collection, and no occasion should be lost to obtain them; they are important as personal souvenirs if they have no historic value. Books having the autographs of their authors are especially to be prized, and should form a prime object with the collector.

Although the day of rare manuscripts in private hands has gone by somewhat and we can never hope to have the opportunities of collecting which the experts of the days of the fifties had, yet occasionally, even now, are opportunities of getting at some rare things in this line. Only recently the Boston public library purchased for $2.30 at a junk shop (tied up in a little bundle) a lot of thirty-two manuscript sermons, preached by and all in the handwriting of Rev. Jonas Clark, of Lexington, Mass. They are on paper about four by six inches, bear dates from 1757 to 1765, and the ink is as distinct now as the day it was written. I had the satisfaction of looking at and handling this bundle of precious old sermons a few weeks since, and it was like going back to ante-Revolutionary times. At the head of the sermon was the place where it was preached and the date; and upon one was this note: “Preached at Concord the day the men broke into my house and stole my plate.” It was at Jonas Clark’s house that Paul Revere called on his night race to alarm the people of Lexington and Concord that the British troops had left Boston. Every precious sheet of this entire lot is to be beautifully inlaid to the quarto size, sumptuously bound, and the portfolio will form one of the rare treasures of the great library to which it belongs.

One of the hobbies of collectors has been the getting of many editions of the same work. At the Boston public library not long ago I asked a well-known collector and most learned and discriminating judge of books if he would collect sixty editions of the Rubaiyat, and his quick reply was, “No, not unless I was Omar mad,” and then he added, “but I could collect one hundred editions to-day if I wanted to.” This little book of only one hundred and one four-line verses is an example of the most singular rage ever known in book collecting; and it seems marvelous that this magnificent poem, the fame of which is now heard in all the literary circles of England and America, should at the time of its publication in 1858 have been so signal a failure that it was a complete drug in the market. It was printed in a little pamphlet of twenty-one pages, folded in plain brown-paper wrappers, and was finally sold from a penny box outside the door of Mr. Quaritch’s famous shop in Castle Street, Leicester Square, London. Ten years afterward its merit was first discovered by an American scholar, Mr. Charles Eliot Norton, and to-day more than one hundred editions are on the market. Indeed, a selection from
eighteen or twenty different editions, ranging in price from twenty-five cents to eight dollars, was not difficult at any bookstore in Maine during the late holiday season; while a copy of the first edition would more than bring its weight in gold. It is said that Cornelius L. Alvord, Jr., who "got away" with more than half a million belonging to the First National Bank of New York, left upon his desk a copy of the Rubaiyat open at the quotation:

"Some for the glories of this world; and some
Sigh for the Prophet's Paradise to come;
Ah, take the cash and let the credit go,
Nor heed the rumble of a distant drum."

Mr. Alvord evidently followed this suggestion. He took the cash, and every time he did so no doubt heard the rumble of a distant drum. But he must now hear the rumble of a near-by drum along the steel corridors in Sing Sing for thirteen years. Scholars, however, most love that quartrain dear to the heart of the book-lover:

"A book of verses underneath the bough,
A jug of wine, a loaf of bread—and thou
Beside me singing in the wilderness—
Oh, wilderness were Paradise enow!"

Does not this stanza picture the earthly paradise of which poets have sung with as much sweetness as that with which it has ever been described—ringing lines, memorable for their beauty and their haunting melody.

In recent years there has been a considerable rage among collectors for first editions. I asked my learned Boston friend, the custodian of one of the departments of its noble library, his opinion of the collection of first editions. His reply was, "I would accept a first edition of Chaucer or the Fairy Queen, but I would not give a single penny more for a first edition than I would for any other." And it is true that some of the recent editions of Chaucer are far more desirable than the first, because they embrace important illustrations of the text. A recent Chaucer, enriched with the critical knowledge of Professor Skeat and the editors of the Early English Text Society, is a far more desirable one than the first could possibly be except as a literary curiosity. Where considerable textual changes have taken place in a work of great educational or philosophic importance, it is well to possess the several editions if in the line of one's specialty, otherwise we should rest content with one good, serviceable, accurate edition. First editions generally command high prices and the hunt for them is interesting. There is a collector in Boston who has hunted for years for a copy of the first edition of a book you might not care for, Henry George's Progress and Poverty, printed in San Francisco, and has not procured it yet.
But there comes a big find once in a while, as when another Boston collector found in a box on the street corner at the Old South bookstore a copy of Willoughby’s Journey to the Ohio, printed in 1754, for which he paid fifty cents, that was worth $150 the moment he put it in his pocket. Such opportunities are not yet clean gone forever. The book hunter has prizes in store for him yet; but not such prizes as there were twenty-five years ago, when Mr. Beverly Chew, of New York, began his collection of first American editions of the complete writings of Longfellow, Hawthorne, Emerson, Thoreau, Whittier, Lowell, Poe, Aldrich and other of the golden-age writers of American literature, a splendid collection, recently purchased by a New York firm and again immediately sold, to whom they would not say, so sacrely are rare collections of first editions guarded.

I should weary you beyond all measure should I even allude in the briefest way to the collection of book-plates, prints and privately-printed works of the book clubs, and of those who gather Stevenson’s and Field’s and Kipling’s books galore. One of these collections was sold this month in Boston,—that of the print and portrait collection of Dr. Charles E. Clark, of Salem,—which had in its 3000 lots 544 portraits of Washington, the largest and perhaps the finest collection of Washington portraits in existence.

What magnificent private libraries and what a mighty race of giant collectors there were in the early days when William Menzies, W. Elliot Woodward, Thomas Addis Emmett, Richard Hoe and George W. Childs—press makers and journalists—were gathering their priceless collections; when George Brinley was sending his tin peddlers all over New England exchanging pans and two-quart dippers for the rare treasures contained in attic trunks—old pamphlets, manuscripts and early Americana, the catalogue of which made five large volumes, and when James Lenox was buying the rare treasures of his unrivaled collection, so exclusive and hermit-like in his habits that he never admitted his purchasing agents and book-binders beyond the vestibule of his residence. Some of these libraries have been dispersed to the joy of other collectors; others have become parts of the great libraries of the country, while one or two are yet held by their wealthy owners. In the Lenox library in New York is the most magnificent collection of Bibles in the world—from the celebrated Mazarine Bible of 1455, the first book printed from movable type, down to those of recent date; while it also possesses the finest collection of the literature of the Elizabethan period known to students.

But more and more the rare books, priceless manuscripts, first editions and magnificently illustrated large paper copies in limited impressions are so rapidly going into the possession of millionaires
that we wonder if they do not form a trust for such things. William B. Havemeyer, of New York, has the best Washington collection in the country, single letters in which are worth $500 each, and nobody but Mr. Havemeyer could pay $1750 for a few pages in the handwriting of Washington, as he did at the Clark sale a few days ago; while Anthony J. Drexel, of Philadelphia, J. Pierpont Morgan and Robert Hoe, of New York, are among the millionaire book collectors. A rare or scarce book, pamphlet, map or autograph does not come upon the market that they do not get it. Thus we find the rare and valuable libraries are those belonging to the men of great wealth. Occasionally such collections are given to public libraries, as was the collection of prints of Samuel P. Avery to the New York library, and the Ford collection of 100,000 numbers to the Brooklyn library. In such dispersion of the rare private collections the public shares their use without being at any cost in the purchase.

Here is where the splendid service of the free public library comes in. Millionaires can possess their first-folio Shakespeares and Tamerlanes, the private student his large bookcase of choice, selected volumes; but the free library is for all. The laborer going home in his work-stained garments can call at the public library and take the book that will teach him how to do his work better; the house-mother, anxious for some mind-culture to lighten the home cares, can have free use of those volumes which open the treasuries of romance and poetry, art and song, while little children plodding at school can obtain those books which, overnight, will help them in their lessons and early inspire them with a love of knowledge. Fortunate the people of any town where the free public library has been established to spread abroad, without money and without price, that which is better than money—those books which contribute to the amenities of life and open a new world of intellectual charm to souls thirsting for the grand literature of all the ages; and thrice happy must that man be who of his abundance gives a part to make such things possible to the poor.