

**COLLECTED ESSAYS,
VOL. II: GOSSIP IN A
LIBRARY**

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Collected essays, Vol. II: Gossip in a library by Edmund Gosse

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EDMUND GOSSE

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COLLECTED ESSAYS
OF
EDMUND GOSSE

VOL. II

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*O blessed Letters, that combine in one
All ages past, and make one live with all:
By you we doe conferre with who are gone,
And the dead-living unto counsell call:
By you th' unborne shall have communion
Of what we feele, and what doth us befall.*

SAM. DANIEL Musophilus. 1602.

GOSSIP IN A LIBRARY

INTRODUCTORY

It is curious to reflect that the library, in our customary sense, is quite a modern institution. Three hundred years ago there were no public libraries in Europe. The Ambrosian, at Milan, dates from 1608; the Bodleian, at Oxford, from 1612. To these Angelo Rocca added his in Rome, in 1620. But private collections of books always existed, and these were the haunts of learning, the little glimmering hearths over which knowledge spread her cold fingers, in the darkest ages of the world. To-day, although national and private munificence has increased the number of public libraries so widely that almost every reader is within reach of books, the private library still flourishes. There are men all through the civilised world to whom a book is a jewel—an individual possession of great price. I have been asked to gossip about my books, for I also am a bibliophile. But when I think of the great collections of fine books, of the libraries of the magnificent, I do not know whether I dare admit any stranger to glance at mine. The Mayor of Queenborough feels as though he were a very important personage till Royalty drives through his borough without noticing his scarf and his cocked