

# **A GLANCE AT PRIVATE LIBRARIES**

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A Glance at Private Libraries by Luther Farnham

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**LUTHER FARNHAM**

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PRIVATE LIBRARIES**



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GLANCE

AT

Private Libraries,

BY

LUTHER FARNHAM.

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BOSTON:  
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47 Washington Street.  
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## PREFATORY NOTE.

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A few years since the late Prof. B. B. Edwards, D. D., requested me to prepare for the *Bibliotheca Sacra*, of which he was an editor, an article on private libraries. The preparation of the paper was commenced, but on the death of Prof. E. was suspended, until recently, when it was completed according to the original plan. By request the manuscript was read at the regular monthly meeting of the New England Historic-Genealogical Society in October last, and in accordance with a unanimous vote of the Society, it is now published.

The libraries noticed are chiefly of Boston and neighborhood, and embrace only those that have accidentally or otherwise come to my knowledge. Of course, the faintest glimpse of libraries, such as is given, does not do them justice, and is a very imperfect view of any one of them; still it was all that the plan of the Essay embraced. Possibly there may be a demand for a view of the wealth of all the private libraries in this section of the country, or even of the whole land, at no distant day. This commencement of researches in a new and interesting field of inquiry is respectfully dedicated to all collectors and lovers of good books, with the hope, that they may find in it somewhat of entertainment, if not of instruction.

L. F.

*Boston, December 1, 1855.*





## A GLANCE AT PRIVATE LIBRARIES.

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THIS country is sadly in want of books. We can boast of a land stretching from sea to sea, with the greatest varieties of climate, soil and productions. Our national power upon land and water is unquestioned. In opulence, population, present and prospective, in the character of its institutions, and in the intelligence of the people, and in most that goes to make a great nation, this republic ranks as a first-rate power. The most civilized states of Europe send their agents to examine our system of free schools, with the idea that the old world may be better off to introduce them ; and our institutions of mercy and charity are more than respectable ; while American ships and other fruits of our skill excite general admiration. We hear of men from the other side who visit us to witness the autumnal tints of an American forest, or to gaze upon Ni-

agara, or a prairie, or the lakes, or the father of rivers.

But what visitor crosses the sea to view our libraries? Who has ever heard of them abroad, except their diminutive size and meager character has given them a "bad eminence?" We have not a single library with one hundred thousand volumes, while there are several in Europe with five times this number of books, and one or two with a million or more.\* Indeed, our largest public libraries would attract no special notice in a small town on the Continent. And our libraries (unless there may be recent exceptions) have been as much wanting in the quality of their books, as in their quantity. To look at many of the volumes that are to be found in our public libraries, one would think, that those who by a figure of speech are called the donors, ought to pay for their storage, particularly, where they mar the appearance of very nice library halls. They remind one of the books that are sometimes sent to the missionaries of the western section of our country, apparently because the proprietors

\* The Paris correspondent of an American journal has recently written of what he terms the largest library in the world. He says: "The *Bibliothèque Nationale*, in the Rue Richelieu contains at the present time fourteen hundred thousand volumes, or about four times the whole number of books in the public libraries of Massachusetts. The volumes are mostly in handsome binding of colored leather enriched with gilt, and are placed in solid walls from floor to ceiling, with net work for protection as high as the hand can reach."

know not how else to dispose of them,—forgetting that the only light that many books can shed is that evolved when they are used to kindle fires.

America has produced a few authors worthy the name ; but it has been in spite of the want of books in this country, and not through their abundance. Our great authors have found the material of their works in the vast libraries of Europe, or else they have imported it for themselves at a very heavy expense. The late President Adams undertook to collect the authorities referred to by Gibbon in his History of Rome,—not half of which were then, probably, to be found on this side of the water. The lecturer upon any historical subject, except that pertaining to America, would be obliged to visit Europe to find ample materials,—certainly if he was confined to the *public* libraries of this country.

Our nation is not to be reproached for its paucity of libraries. There were many things that necessarily preceded large public collections of books. The land was to be cleared and cultivated. After bread came the church, the school-house, and the town-house, and such collections of books as might be expected in a new country of vast material resources, that began early to mature,