



## BOOKS AND LIBRARIES IN CLASSICAL TIMES

**I**N literary Greece and Rome, so far as we can tell from the somewhat meagre information handed down to us, literature was pursued for her own sake, and filthy lucre did not enter into the calculations of authors, who appear to have been satisfied if their works met with the approval of those who were competent to judge of them. Literature walked alone, and had not as yet entered into partnership with commerce. The writing of books for pecuniary profit is a wholly modern development, and even now it is more often an aspiration than a realization.

In those days, when an author desired to make known a work, he would read it aloud to an invited party of friends. This reading of original compositions became in time a common item of the programme provided by a host for the entertainment of his guests, and it is not difficult to imagine that such a custom was often subjected to grave abuse, from the guests' point of view. Later, the private reading developed into the public lecture. Lectures of this kind became very frequent in Rome, and we are told that it was looked upon as a sort of festival when a fashionable author announced a reading. But we are also told that some

of the audience often treated a lecturer of mediocre merit with scant courtesy, entering late and leaving early, and frequently they who applauded most were those who had listened least. The public reading is recorded of a poem composed by Nero. It was read to the people on the Capitol, and the manuscript, which was written in letters of gold, was afterwards deposited in the temple of Jupiter Capitolinus.

If a work happened to attract attention by reason of its author's reputation or its own merit, it was copied by students or others who had heard and admired it. This was the only way in which literary productions could be dispersed and made known to the public at large, or a collection of books be gathered together. As the literary taste developed, those who were sufficiently wealthy kept slaves whose sole business it was to copy books, which books might be either the original works of their master, who by this means disseminated his compositions, or the works of others, for the benefit of their master's library. These slaves, being of necessity well educated and skillful scribes, were purchased at high prices and held in great esteem by their owners. But obviously it

was only the rich who could command such service, and ordinary folk had to resort to the bookseller.

The booksellers of Athens and Rome were those who made copies of books, or employed slaves to make them, and sold or let them on hire to those who had need of them. The author had no voice in these matters. There was nothing to prevent anyone who borrowed or otherwise got possession of his work from making copies of the manuscript if he chose, and making money from the copies if he could. "Copyright" was a word unknown in those days, and for centuries after. The booksellers advertised their wares by notices affixed to the door-posts of their shops, giving the names of new or desirable works, and sometimes read these works aloud to their friends and patrons. Their shops were favorite places of resort for persons of leisure and literary tastes.

Copyists of books retained a high place in the order of things literary until the introduction of printing, and without their labors we should know nothing of ancient literature, seeing that no original manuscript of any

classical author has survived. And apart from its purely literary value, which is variable, the work of the early mediæval scribes in many instances reaches a high artistic standard, and exhibits marvelous skill in an accomplishment now numbered among the lost arts.

On the subjects of libraries, as on all literary matters in ancient times, hardly any solid information is available. But we know that Egypt was to the fore in this respect as in so many others. Yet of all the collections of books which, since they are frequently alluded to in the inscriptions, she undoubtedly possessed, stored in her kings' palaces and her temple archives, there is only one which is mentioned in history, and that by a single historian. According to Diodorus Siculus, this library was made by Osymandyas, who was king of Egypt at a date which has not been precisely determined. He tells us that its entrance exhibited the inscription: "Place of Healing for the Soul," or, as it has been variously rendered, "Balsam for the Soul," or, "Dispensary of the Mind."

## SING A SONG O' SUNSHINE

BY ROBERTUS LOVE.

LET us sing a song o' cheer!  
Sing a song o' sunshine!  
Sincè the days are mostly clear,  
Why should people shun shine?

Sing a song o' sunny days!  
Sing a song o' springtime!

Life is full of joyous lays,  
Every time is sing-time.

So we'll sing a song o' cheer!  
Let's forget the dumber time  
When the winter leaf is sere:  
Sing a song o' summertime!