

Yet in this age of  
cheap literature, cost



**ASSIGN  
BUSTER**

Yet there are many people who have this key, and yet are shut out from these treasuries. Books, even in this age of cheap literature, cost money: and there are many poor people who cannot afford even the price of a cheap edition.

They can read, and they crave for knowledge, but they cannot satisfy their thirst because they cannot pay the small cost of a book. It was for such people that Free Libraries were established. Many have been provided in England and America by philanthropic people, like Mr. Carnegie, the American millionaire; but in England, every town has its Free Library, provided and supported by Municipal funds and managed by a special committee. They are called Free Libraries, because the members have to pay no subscription. Any decent person, however poor, can join, and can get any book out he wants without charge. There is no doubt that Free Libraries are a great blessing, and, when the books are wisely selected, they have a great educational value, and have done much to encourage the habit of reading among the working classes.

Of course, most of the books are novels, and most of the readers are novel-readers; but there is not much harm in this, as the reading of sound fiction is not only a source of amusement and pleasure, but is also a means of broadening one's mind and learning more about life and human nature. And there is always a good selection of serious books history, biography, travel, poetry, and literature which are appreciated by many readers. It is difficult to find any objections to Free Libraries, which on the whole are very useful institutions; but there are one or two. One disadvantage is that the much-read and well-thumbed books of a Free Library are often the carriers of

infectious diseases. A popular novel that passes through many hands becomes soiled and dirty, and may pass on a disease from an infected reader to the next person who takes the book out. Another disadvantage is that such libraries discourage the buying of books by people who could well afford to have their own.

If a book is worth reading and re-reading, it is worth buying and keeping : and a real book-lover never wants to read a borrowed book, if he can afford to buy it for himself. Yet there are people who think nothing of spending Rs. 50/- on a dinner, who would think it a waste of money to spend the same sum on books which would be a constant source of pleasure and instruction.