

PREFACE

It is difficult today to realise that there was a time when the bulk of the knowledge of mankind was contained in a few priceless manuscripts which were faithfully copied by scholars for the benefit of others and jealously guarded. Mankind to-day is confronted with an ever increasing flood of literature that pours from the printing presses with such bewildering rapidity that, for many, the task of sifting the wheat from the chaff becomes so frightening that they abandon the unequal struggle and fall into apathy. So rapid are the advances made in many subjects that many works are already out-of-date when they make their first appearance on the bookseller's shelves. The expense involved in keeping abreast of these advances is beyond the means of most people and it is here that a good library provides a solution not only to the question of individual expense but also to that of selection. The cultural standard of any community is reflected in its libraries and the use made of them. In a democratic country such as this the wishes of the people are paramount and the blame must be borne by them if their libraries fail to fulfil their function. This function has been admirably defined by the late Professor H. Laski (Professor of Political Economy at the University of London) when addressing the fifty-eighth annual conference of the Library Association of England in 1935.

"I believe that the purpose of a public library is to make accessible the heritage of culture, in the widest sense of the word, to any who may wish to take advantage of it. The first implication, therefore, of my view is the need to view that heritage as something independent of any special attitude of mind. We are not entitled to narrow its substance because we are Socialists or Conservatives, Christians or Freethinkers, exponents of one philosophy rather than