

Library

AN UNQUIET
HISTORY

Matthew Battles

W. W. NORTON & COMPANY
NEW YORK ♦ LONDON

FOR MY FAMILY
and
FOR KEN CARPENTER
Keeper of books

Copyright © 2015, 2003 by Matthew Battles

All rights reserved
Printed in the United States of America
Reissued 2015

For information about permission to reproduce selections from this book, write to
Permissions, W.W. Norton & Company, Inc., 500 Fifth Avenue, New York, NY 10110

Manufacturing by RR Donnelley, Harrisonburg
Book design by BTB
Production manager: Andrew Marasia

LIBRARY OF CONGRESS CATALOGING-IN-PUBLICATION DATA

Battles, Matthew.
Library : an unquiet history / by Matthew Battles.— 1st ed.
p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 0-393-02029-0 (hardcover)

1. Libraries—History. 2. Libraries and society—History. 3. Books—History. I. Title.
Z721.B28 2003
027'.009—dc21

2002156439

ISBN 978-0-393-35145-3 pbk.

W.W. Norton & Company, Inc., 500 Fifth Avenue, New York, N.Y. 10110
www.wwnorton.com

W.W. Norton & Company Ltd., Castle House, 75/76 Wells Street, London W1T 3QT

2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 0

Contents

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS ♦ IX

1. READING THE LIBRARY ♦ 3

2. BURNING ALEXANDRIA ♦ 22

3. THE HOUSE OF WISDOM ♦ 56

4. THE BATTLE OF THE BOOKS ♦ 82

5. BOOKS FOR ALL ♦ 117

6. KNOWLEDGE ON FIRE ♦ 156

7. LOST IN THE STACKS ♦ 192

AFTERWORD ♦ 215

NOTES ON SOURCES ♦ 223

INDEX ♦ 237

CHAPTER FIVE

Books for All

It was to be the year of his triumph, and yet for Enoch Soames 1891 proved more dreadful than ever. His new work unpublished, his first books out of print, Enoch peered out through an absinthe haze at a London reeling with backstabbers, tin ears, and nincompoops. Sensible of his friends' dismissal of his work and his person, he had arrived at the inescapable conclusion that the present world held no more charm for him. His hopes lay in the future: there, he was sure, his name would loom as one of the nineteenth century's poetic prophets, rightfully eclipsing the meager lights of contemporary poseurs. In his hunger for this future, finally, he made a desperate pact, a deal with the devil: an eternity in hell for the opportunity to visit the Round Reading Room of the British Library one hundred years later, to find his books in the collection, his name draped in laurels. To seal the contract, he invited the devil

himself to lunch at a London café, and brought along a witness—his last friend, a newspaper writer and essayist named Max.

The journalist jumped to his friend's defense. But before he could argue the case with the devil himself (less a horned imp than an oiled and weary flâneur), his friend Soames disappeared without so much as a whiff of brimstone. The journalist awaited his friend's return, dreading the results of his expedition into the future. When Soames at last reappeared, dismayed and demoralized, the journalist knew the truth before it was uttered: Soames had failed to find his name among the authors listed in the 1991 edition of the *Catalogue of the British Library*. Worse still, in desperation, Soames had asked the library assistant for a copy of a good book on English literature of the nineteenth century. He managed to find his name in the index—a momentary pleasure—only to discover upon turning to the page that he was listed as a minor character in a short story written by his friend the journalist! Chagrined, the writer comforted his friend, but only for a short while—in a flash the devil sidled up to the café table to claim Soames's soul.

So goes the sorry tale of Enoch Soames as told by Max Beerbohm in *Seven Men*, his collection of short stories. Beerbohm wrote the story early in the twentieth century, and his imagined British Library of the future is little changed from the one he knew himself. The people all look identical, of course—after all, this is the future; they are hairless, dress in tasteful gray serge uniforms, and write a horrid, phonetically simplified version of English—but the library itself is still the nineteenth-century Round Reading Room, the volumes of the printed catalog standing sentry in their ordered ranks around the great desk at the room's navel. In Beerbohm's future library, readers still flop those cumbersome volumes on the top of their shelves with a resounding boom, still look up the texts they want among the endless pages of the catalog, still fill out little slips

and sit at heated desks to await the delivery of their books. For all its wit and invention, Beerbohm's story is decidedly conservative when it comes to the need for—and even the possibility of—change in the library.

What's striking now is that Beerbohm was very nearly right: in 1991, readers still perused the many volumes of the printed catalog, still filled out their call slips in longhand. Outwardly, the library changed little between the turn of the twentieth century and the day Beerbohm's fictional poet paid his visit in 1991. All the changes—all the *future*—would seem to have taken place in the decade after 1991. Much changed at the British Library, to be sure: it moved from its British Museum quarters to a vast new complex on Euston Road; its online catalog, like those of libraries great and small around the world, fundamentally altered the way readers get and use books. But for all the changes and despite its democratization, the library remains a numinous place. As much to us as to Soames, inclusion in the library still represents a landmark in a literary life.

Inwardly, libraries in 1891 had changed a great deal over the course of the nineteenth century, in ways that made Soames's hopes quixotic. For the library had filled up; by the end of the nineteenth century, it was stocked so full of books that it had become easy to think that everyone might find a book of his or her own within its stacks. In the preceding century, Jonathan Swift could still imagine the library as a stage populated by a small number of dramatis personae whose names chimed with significance; the library then was a kind of monastery in which a few elite texts paced the hours, shook their censers, and sang in plainchant the conversation of the ages. But in the nineteenth century, the sheer proliferation of books in number and kind transformed the library from temple to market, from canon to cornucopia. That makes Soames's quest all the more

tragic—for the library in which he could find no trace of himself was a model of the society it served. His absence from the library is less about literary failure in the traditional sense than about the loss of individual identity in an increasingly complex metropolitan world.

Like Enoch Soames, librarians in the nineteenth century looked to the future to fix their identity. Previously, the librarian had been animated by his relationship with books—relatively small numbers of books, organized into canons, consumed in the main by readers already intimate with them. The librarian's role, then, was largely custodial; he counted books, fetched them, and later returned them to the shelves. But with the efflorescence of printed matter and its increased consumption by a reading public, the librarian's relation with readers began to supplant his connection with the books in his charge. The principal image of the librarian switched from custodian to caregiver. In the nineteenth century, both the professional literature and the popular press presented images of librarians toiling to shape the tastes of their patrons, to conduct them through the pitfalls of the cheap, the tawdry, and the “highly seasoned” reading found in novels and newspapers toward a redeeming vision of high literary culture.

These images of the librarian bring to mind Prometheus, the Titan who presented mankind with the gift of fire. Two things are worth remembering about Prometheus: first, that he is moved by one emotion, pity, and his gift ultimately inspires another emotion, hubris, in the hearts of human beings. The tragic flaws of the Promethean impulse, pity and hubris, are the emotional poles of the librarian in the nineteenth century as well: pity for the low station of the reader, and hubris for the possibilities the library offers for the reformation of culture and society. The second thing to remember about the myth is the punishment of Prometheus. For his transgres-

sion against the power of the gods, Zeus chains the Titan to a wave-battered rock by the sea and sends down vultures to eat his immortal liver forever.

Like the Titans when Zeus and his fellow gods appeared, librarians found themselves in a ruptured universe, one with new forces in play. As the number of books grew, the intellectual integument that bound them into a cultural whole called “literature” was stretched to the breaking point. One of the mottoes of the public library movement that swept western Europe and America in the nineteenth century went like this: “a book for every person.” But the search for that personal story had been an existential dilemma long before it became an issue in library science. Beerbohm knew this. He knew, too, what those uniformed readers were doing in the library when they were disturbed that summer day in 1991 by the appearance of a wild-haired, fin-de-siècle poet in their midst. They, as much as poor Enoch, were searching for themselves.

WHEN THE BRITISH MUSEUM OPENED IN 1753, few Britons would have thought to go looking for their own personal book within it. Had they tried, most would have been disappointed: though intended as Britain's national collection, it was modest by the standards of other such libraries across Europe. At its opening, it contained some 51,000 books; by the end of the eighteenth century, the number had actually declined, to approximately 48,000. This was because the museum library housed much duplicate material, which librarians assiduously sold off or gave away as practicably as they could. Then as now, book collecting was fashionable, and fashionable people tend to buy the same fashionable books. The new library depended on such genteel collections—given or purchased with the museum's meager funds—to build its own store of books. The first collection the museum purchased came from the Royal Society

president Sir Hans Sloane, bought for the princely sum of twenty thousand pounds (nearly two million at today's rate). The library tried to recover from this impoverishing acquisition by sponsoring a lottery; but allegations of corruption brought the lottery to an inconclusive close, and the library was forced to rely on parliamentary whims to keep itself in operation.

The British Library also grew as a result of its role as copyright registrar, which meant that a copy of every book published in Britain had a place in its stacks. The Royal Library had played this role long before, although publishers had deposited their work only sporadically, as Richard Bentley lamented in the late seventeenth century. One hundred years later, however, Britain was both drawing inward in its sense of difference from the other nations of Europe and expanding in hopes and power as an empire—and the need to define the national literature was felt more acutely. France, too, had its copyright library—the formidable Bibliothèque Nationale, whose collections at the end of the eighteenth century had swollen to more than 300,000 books, thanks to the seizure of the libraries of aristocrats and clergy in the wake of the revolution of 1793. As the nineteenth century wore on, the British Library would catch up with, but never surpass, its French counterpart; the Continental elegance of the Bibliothèque Nationale's soaring, iron-laced vaults would provide counterpoint to the classical austerity of the Round Reading Room.

But in the first few decades of the nineteenth century Britain's national library began to grow—and in fact to balloon: by 1833, it owned nearly a quarter of a million books, a fivefold increase. Already in 1811, the *Times* of London was produced on steam-driven, drum-fed presses, and by the 1820s the use of steam to power printing presses was commonplace, and a number of technologies now converged to dramatically accelerate the pace at which books



©1996 Diane Asséo Griliches

The old reading room of the Bibliothèque Nationale, designed by Henri Labrousse and built in 1862. Its latticed domes and soaring columns express the sublime power of nineteenth-century iron construction. This image appears in Diane Asséo Griliches's book of her library photographs, Library: The Drama Within (Washington, D.C.: Library of Congress, 1996).

and other printed materials were produced. Printing, which had changed little between the fifteenth and the eighteenth centuries, at once ceased to be an artisanal craft, and the book became subject to the mass production that was a hallmark of the industrial revolution.

One of the most fascinating images of the mass production of books in the nineteenth century appears in the Harper Brothers Story Book Series, which conveyed all manner of useful information to its mostly young readers. In Jacob Abbott's *The Harper Establishment; or, How the Story Books Are Made* (1855), the series examined the machinery of its own production. Abbott gives the reader a tour of Harper Brothers' great plant on Cliff Street and Franklin Square

in New York City, a plant that by this time was producing books “by the hundreds of thousands.”

Central to Abbott’s book is an engraving that depicts the idealized efficiency, coordination, and mechanization of the printing process at midcentury. Although Abbott focused on the magic of the machine—the piping of steam, the transmission of power by shafts and belts, and the glamorous dance of the presses—his grand plan of the Cliff Street building shows that at midcentury it was above all the massing of labor power, of *people*—people segregated by gender and task and regulated by that cyclopean manifestation of modernity, the clock on the wall—that turned the book from being an objet d’art to being an interchangeable part.

Abbott’s series of vignettes is framed by the interlaced iron beams that make up the floors: wrought iron has—in theory, at least—emancipated the workers from the fear of fire. It allows them to use gas lighting and to operate high-temperature equipment safely, freeing production from the strictures of natural light, which formerly limited printing to small-scale production carried on in the daylight hours.

As Walter Benjamin writes in his *Arcades Project*, the nineteenth century began with the use of cast iron to frame luxury spaces like London’s Crystal Palace. The Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris, too, showed off its iron skeleton, which bore the great vaults of the reading room skyward. The same iron-framing practices later transformed the stacks of the great libraries, too, allowing them to hold more books, better organized and safer from fire, than could have been imagined in the decades before. The importance of iron to nineteenth-century architecture is so great that Abbott digresses for a full chapter to explain the manufacture of iron beams and their use in construction.

In the image of the Harper Brothers plant, stages in the print-

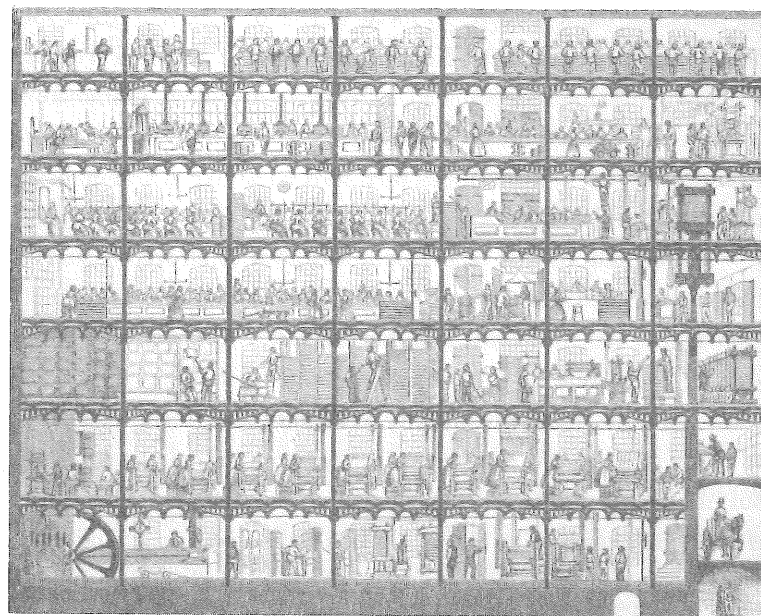


Diagram of the Harper Brothers printing plant from Jacob Abbott's The Harper Establishment (1855). Houghton Library B 5940.10. By permission of Houghton Library, Harvard University.*

ing process are framed by a web of iron beams—more pedestrian than the soaring iron vaults of the Bibliothèque Nationale, but no less miraculous. The room with the great wheel in the picture’s lower left-hand corner contains “the engine and machinery which supply moving power for all the operation of the establishment,” which is “conveyed to the different floors by a system of axles, pulleys, and bands.” Elsewhere on this first level, hydraulic presses flatten and smooth paper, and workers moisten pages to receive the ink.

At the far right, a door leads to the vaults where the printing plates are stored. These plates were electrotypes, created by electrify-

ing blocks of hand-set type to mold a layer of copper to their surfaces. Underneath the arched entryway—where a driver is arriving, perhaps delivering a fresh load of paper—two men illuminate a room of the vaults with their lantern. The vault is a kind of library where the plates, nascent books themselves, rest like jars of embryos in a mad scientist's laboratory.

Abbott tells us that “the accumulation of electrotype plates” is “very great”—that the stores of the “Magazine alone are rapidly approaching ten thousand” and that “[t]here is one plate for every page of every one of the many hundreds of volumes which the house publishes, making from fifty to seventy tons in all.” Elsewhere he allows that this inventory increases by two hundred plates per day. But Abbott has no use for metaphysical speculations on these masses of type. He's content to report, “When a new edition of any book is required, the plates are brought out from these vaults and put upon the presses. When the work is finished, they are taken back again to the vaults.”

The building's next level contains “the great press room.” Abbott remarks that the presses weigh two tons each, making their arrangement with respect to the columns and floor supports crucial. Above the presses runs a series of belts connected by a shaft, which transmits power to each press from the steam engine in the bowels of the building. Abbott then describes the flurry of activity that goes on in the press room:

We observe that each of the presses is attended by a girl . . . [whose] duty is to *feed* the press with paper, placing one sheet at a time. The sheet is thrown over when it is printed by what is called the fly, which is a light wooden frame, like a hand with a multitude of slender fingers, which lifts the sheet when it has received the impression, and throws it over upon the pile formed by those

which had been printed before. At the right-hand end of the room this fly may be seen very distinctly in the act of going back after another sheet of paper, and on the other presses along the line we see it in various positions, bringing the printed sheet over.

Despite their monstrous bulk, these machines can swiftly turn out pages with their delicate mechanical fingers. “Visitors,” Abbott reports, “are always particularly pleased with the life-like actions of the iron fingers” of the presses. “There is something imposing and almost sublime,” he opines, “in the calm and steady dignity with which the ponderous engines continue their ceaseless toil.”

Elsewhere throughout the building, books are stacked, sewn, ground, and pressed into being (especially pressed—Abbott informs his readers that no fewer than twenty-five separate machines are used to smash the books into their compact, shelf-ready shape). The top floor contains the composing room, where typesetters fill their composing sticks with type sorts, reading backward. This operation, the heart of the printer's craft, takes place at the zenith of the building. Later, Abbott describes at length the work of the compositor, in whom he witnesses a miraculous marriage of artisanal integrity and manufacturing efficiency:

He does not look at the face of the type to see what letter it is when he takes it up and sets it in the composing-stick, but takes it for granted, if it comes from the right compartment, it is the right letter. He has not time to look at it more than to give it a slight glance to see that he puts it into the composing-stick right end up. . . . [A] man, in order to set up a thousand ems [a unit of typographic measure, a typical letter space] in an hour, has to take up and place three thousand different pieces of metal. And when we consider that he has to select all these separate pieces from a

great many different compartments, no less than one hundred and forty in all . . . it is plain his movements must be very active.

Printed by unfeeling machines, shipped from factories in bales and stacks, the book is no longer the work of an artisan. Its origins are mystified, bound up in electromechanical processes worthy of Frankenstein's workshop. The book now is a simple commodity—but like most modern commodities, it is opaque to its user, who has no idea how to make one himself. And yet, as Abbott reveals, for all the electroplating and the steam-impelled dexterity of the presses, it is the fingers of craftspeople that advance the book into the machine age.

AS THE MASS-PRODUCED BOOK FLOURISHED, the British Museum, like national libraries throughout Europe and in America, suddenly bloomed with books by the hundreds of thousands. The unlikely person who would preside over this boom at the Library of the British Museum—and become the nineteenth century's first librarian-Prometheus in the process—began his career as an exiled Italian revolutionary. A rising young lawyer, Antonio Panizzi antagonized the ducal government of his native Modena with his attachment to secret societies that mixed liberal politics with quasi-Masonic mysticism (this attraction to progressive ideology and esoteric knowledge perhaps prefigures Panizzi's career as a librarian). When show trials convicted comrades of treason, Panizzi escaped over the Alps and in 1823 published an account of the trials that earned him a death sentence in absentia and the guarantee of a life of exile. Panizzi eventually arrived in London; penniless, unable to speak the language, and repelled by the expatriates' bohemian demimonde, he made his way teaching Italian language and history. The teaching improved his English, while his revolutionary bona fides attracted powerful patrons; soon he was lecturing on the Renaissance, pub-

lishing scholarly articles in the *Edinburgh Review*, and joining the faculty of the newly established University of London. Although the professorial appointment cemented Panizzi's place in his adopted country, it did little to support him: a professor's salary was paid out of student fees, and at the practically minded University of London, few students had time for lectures on the Renaissance. Panizzi was happy to accept the recommendation of a well-placed friend to become an assistant librarian of the British Museum in 1831; his salary, "for five days in the week," amounted to two hundred pounds per year.

Panizzi quickly settled into the work that would assure his importance in the history of the British Library: cataloging. The library's first printed catalog, which appeared in 1810, ran to seven volumes. Like all catalogs of its day, it was simply an alphabetical list of the books in the library, which served the librarians as an inventory of the books in their charge. Each year, most libraries would close for a few weeks, to permit the librarians to run down the list and ensure that each book was still in its place on the shelf. Catalogs were designed for little else. Readers, after all, generally came to the library prepared; they knew what books they wanted to see, and what they wanted to find in them.

Yet between the time that first catalog was compiled and Panizzi's arrival at the British Museum, the number of books in its collections had increased by an order of magnitude. The original seven-volume catalog had been stuffed by librarians with scribbled additions and addenda; its interleavings had swollen it to forty-eight volumes. Plainly, a new catalog was needed. Panizzi, who had already made his reputation within the library by cataloging a collection of impossibly complicated tracts from the English Civil War, was the librarian best prepared to tackle the job.

What Panizzi's labors with obscure pamphlets had shown him

was the dense web of connections authors and publishers forged among works in print. Tracts answered other tracts, which might be reprintings of articles that had appeared in journals and newspapers, or excerpts from books; they could appear simultaneously in several forms, under several imprints. Such crucial information as the author's name, the publisher, and the date and place of publication might be incomplete, erroneous, or missing altogether. Panizzi developed a series of rules that reproduced these relations in the catalog, so that librarians—and crucially, readers—could trace and follow them. Unwittingly at first, he was helping to transform the library catalog from an inventory into an instrument of discovery. It's tempting to say that his discovery of intertextuality among even the most mundane books forebodes the rise of the interconnected world of the digital age; it's probably more accurate, however, to note that, from the vantage point of the wired world, Panizzi's catalog looks like the beginnings of the Internet.

Placed in charge of the effort to compile a new catalog, Panizzi employed these lessons from the start. No partial revision would suffice; he suggested a complete recataloging instead, in order to ensure internal consistency in the finished edition. He went abroad, too, to learn how other libraries made their catalogs. Although Panizzi still had a price on his head, he was now long removed from the early days of his exile, when the government of Modena would mail him advance bills for the cost of his own execution. From his tour of Continental Europe, he returned with a firm conception of the work at hand: "the first and chief object of a Catalogue," he announced in an 1836 report to the museum's trustees, is "easy access to the works which form part of the collection." This was not a tool for the librarians, moreover, but an instrument that "the public have the right to expect in such an institution." Though Panizzi would seem to have traveled far from his radical roots in Italy, his

work was informed all along by a democratic impulse, as he makes clear in this report. "I want the poor student to have the same means of indulging his learned curiosity," he wrote the trustees, "of following his rational pursuits, of consulting the same authorities, of fathoming the most intricate inquiry as the richest man in the kingdom . . . and I contend that the government is bound to give him the most liberal and unlimited assistance in this respect." To Panizzi, the humble library catalog could be more than a list, more even than a guide to knowledge: it could be the means to transform society itself.

Panizzi was appointed Keeper of Printed Books in 1837; and seven years later, the first volume of the catalog, covering the letter A, had only just been published. Not everyone was pleased. "The exotic capriccios of a Librarian . . . should [not] be allowed to delay progress . . . [of] a practical Catalogue," wrote one Sir Nicholas Harris Nicolas, a learned gentleman with a fondness for naval history, who published in the *Spectator* a series of articles condemning the new catalog in 1846. Furthermore, he charged that Panizzi's catalog was "formed on so abstruse a plan as to require *ninety-one* rules for its construction; most, if not all, of which must be committed to memory, before any person can be aware under what head he will find even the commonest book in our language."

Nicolas was jealous of the influence of Panizzi in the library; his crude dig at the librarian's "exotic capriccios" betrays his suspicion of the Italian-born librarian (elsewhere he wonders whether Panizzi "intend[s] to insult the common sense of the country which has had the honour of adopting him"). But Nicolas is concerned about more than the catalog's delayed publication, its cumbrous weight, or its ultimate complexity: he is afraid that it will make the reader do more work.

Early in the project, Panizzi had chosen to add the "pressmark"

of each book to its entry in the catalog. Like a call number on a modern library book, the gnomonic pressmark indicated precisely the place where the book was to be found among the shelves of the library stacks (or “presses,” as bookshelves were commonly called). Unlike call numbers, however, pressmarks referred not to a scheme of knowledge, but to a location; they are not classifications, but only coordinates. Panizzi explained the formulation of pressmarks, and their meaning, in his response to Nicolas: the pressmark “500 *a*,” for instance, “means that the work itself is in the press which is numbered 500, and on the shelf of that press which is distinguished by the letter *a*; if the mark be 500 *a* 2, the meaning is that the work occupies the second place on that shelf; and if marked 500 *a*/6 2, that it is the sixth article in the 2nd vol. on shelf *a* of press 500.” By providing such tutorials, Panizzi wanted to make the library transparent to readers—to replace the mysteries of its workings with a sophistication that would increase a reader’s independence. In previous practice, a reader would simply request a book by title, and the librarians would find its pressmark in their own copy of the catalog in order to fetch it; the book would seem to appear magically as if sprung from the brow of Zeus. Now readers would be required to know the pressmark and to include it on the filled-out ticket they presented to librarians at the desk in order to request books. Nicolas realized that readers in quest of even the most common book, say, Hume’s *History of England*, would have to make a trip to the catalog to look up its pressmark. “We know the inconvenience attending this obligation is felt by many literary men,” he wrote, “whose time is of value to them. . . . [I]n a public library no more should be expected of a Reader than to specify the book he wants by its title, and that all besides belongs to the librarian.” Nicolas sensed that Panizzi was trying to produce not only a new kind of catalog but a new kind of reader as well—one more independent, more knowl-

edgeable of library systems—and he wished to play no part in the revolution.

Nicolas disliked the thought of thumbing more than forty-eight volumes of catalog to find his books. He scarcely could have imagined how fundamentally Panizzi’s reforms would change the very idea of the catalog—not to mention its sheer bulk—in the years to come. If the devil had sent him along with Enoch Soames to visit the Round Reading Room of the British Library in 1991, he would have found that the copy of the printed catalog in use there, with its numerous supplements and additions, had swollen to a daunting twenty-three hundred volumes ringing the central desk.

Nicolas was not the only one who struggled with changes in the operation of the library. Complaints about delays in the delivery of books to readers increased, as did comments about the brusqueness of the staff; a reader named Charles Wilcox was sentenced to twelve months in jail for removing a book from the reading rooms. Letters to the *Times* registered dismay at the long waits, short hours, and delays in the appearance of the new catalog. But conflict was unavoidable: from 1830 to 1840, the number of registered readers grew from 3,000 to 16,000, according to P. R. Harris’s *History of the British Museum Library*. Some 200,000 different books were ordered by those readers in a single year. Throughout the 1840s, however, the number of readers served each day remained steady, averaging about 230—close to the maximum the reading rooms could hold. Things were tight and tense in the Library of the British Museum as Panizzi’s monumental catalog lurched toward completion.

All the fulminations of Nicolas and others hardly checked Panizzi’s progress, however, or his zeal. In 1846, he published his reply to Harris in a book called *On the Supply of Printed Books from the Library to the Reading Room of the British Museum*. There he made clear the challenges the library faced in absorbing growing numbers

of books and readers, and he pulled a sly joke on Nicolas, too, reprinting a letter he had sent early in Panizzi's tenure praising the librarian's initial reforms. Panizzi's antagonists fought back, and in 1847 a royal commission opened an investigation into patrons' complaints about the library and the museum. A highlight of the proceedings was the testimony of the formidable Thomas Carlyle, who joined Nicolas and others in condemning efforts to produce a new catalog. "Elaborate catalogues are not what we require," he scolded the commission, "but legible catalogues accessible to everybody." But when asked about his use of English Civil War tracts in the library, he commended their cataloging, saying that he had "succeeded in getting great benefit from them." This marked a victory for Panizzi, whose cataloging of those very tracts had served as the basis of the new methodology.

Ultimately, the royal commission vindicated Panizzi's policies and allowed him to proceed more or less unhindered. Panizzi's cataloging effort ceased to aim at a single publication and became instead an ongoing effort, as cataloging is in all libraries to this day.

Panizzi's reign at the museum lasted until 1866. He presided over the building of the monumental Round Reading Room (the design of which was based on his own pencil-sketch plan). In 1856 he became principal librarian; in 1869 he was knighted. His cataloging rules held sway in the British Museum well into the 1950s.

Sir Anthony Panizzi, the capricious, Promethean Italian revolutionary, had honored the common sense of the country of his adoption, and had created—not only for its learned lords but for its poor students, for its people, too—one of the greatest libraries in the world.

WHILE PANIZZI WAS ENGAGED in the Promethean project of building a library for the nation, many millions of its people were

mired in poverty. It was in these years of class conflict and economic terror that the public library movement swept through Britain, as the nation's progressive elite recognized that the light of cultural and intellectual energy was lacking in the lives of commoners. The Napoleonic Wars had ground away at the British economy, and a host of stifling taxes and laws placed the greatest burdens on the working class. In 1838, the second of two years of depression, the London radical William Lovett offered Parliament a bill he called the People's Charter. Its six points, which included universal male suffrage and the end of property qualifications for election to government, were aimed at making Parliament answerable to a wider segment of Britain's growing population than ever before. Parliament rejected Lovett's bill, but the Chartist movement was born; it would articulate the hopes of Britain's working poor through the revolutionary year of 1848.

Like the dissenting churchmen two hundred years before, the Chartists recognized the importance of education in fulfilling the aspirations of those excluded from power and position. Throughout Britain in the mid-nineteenth century, Chartist reading rooms—cooperative lending libraries offering books to members of radical organizations—sprang up. These proved extremely popular and soon competed with commercially minded subscription libraries, which for a typically modest fee offered their members access to an ever-changing list of books. The threat to established order did not go unnoticed; *Blackwood's Magazine* in 1825 had proclaimed that "whenever the lower order of any state have obtained a smattering of knowledge they have generally used it to produce national ruin." The trade unionist Francis Place, however, argued that reading would bring the radical poor into the circle of culture, decency, and prosperity, and turn them away from the enticements of the mob. "As a man's understanding is directed to some laudable

pursuit, his desire for information will increase; he will become decent in his conduct and language, sober, discreet. . . . [S]uch a man will frequently rise as the uninformed man sinks."

Although utilitarian philosophers like Jeremy Bentham and his disciple John Stuart Mill were repelled by radical tactics, they supported Place's view that greater access to information would benefit society as a whole. Mill said that the masses were "bad calculators" who "lacked practical good sense," and that a sound education would turn them into good calculators: sober and sensible consumers, well-trained and aspiring workers. Among a class of intellectuals who had begun to believe that economic phenomena followed the universal laws revealed by reason, it made sense that by greater access to information, all people could be trained in reason's principles, turning themselves into rational actors for the greater good of all. As the library historian Alistair Black puts it, "through assimilation of the powers of reason, fostered by education, the masses would come to accept capitalist principles as truth. Education . . . taught men and women to buy in the cheapest markets and sell in the most expensive, . . . in effect, how to be 'at one' with the acquisitive nature of capitalist society." Turning out such "good calculators" was the aim of utilitarian education, and the tradesmen's reading rooms and subscription libraries offered the possibility of doing so in an economical fashion. For in a well-tended library, the utilitarians realized, each book's value to society increases as more people gain access to and use it. Unlike the private book, whose functional use ends when it is read and placed on the shelf for the last time, a library book may continue to open doors.

But not all the utilitarians were coldly economical in their calculations. John Stuart Mill in particular, inspired by the Romantic movement, felt that libraries offered a greater good than reason: they offered happiness as well. Books offered more than opportunities for

training, for indoctrination into the culture of capitalism. They offered an escape, however momentary; they offered repose and reflection, which ultimately encouraged the regard for one's fellow man that is the foundation of altruism.

All this from libraries! So the sponsors of the 1850 public library bill perhaps hoped when they persuaded Parliament to pass it. Alistair Black charts the influence of utilitarian thinking on supporters of public libraries, suggesting that their motives might have been, well, more utilitarian: they hoped that libraries would channel the subversive urges of an underclass traditionally denied access to cultural means. In any case, the tax-supported public libraries quickly supplanted the subscription libraries and Chartist reading rooms. When the Manchester Public Library opened in 1852, it occupied a former Chartist hall, and speakers at the opening ceremony couched their comments in the language of class war and reconciliation. The library promoter Joseph Brotherton hoped that all classes "would learn how necessary they were to each other—how labour and capital were bound together by a link, and how the interests of all classes, rich and poor, were intertwined, like the ivy and the oak." No less a light than Charles Dickens, who spoke as well, was confident that libraries would teach "that capital and labour are not opposed, but mutually dependant and mutually supporting."

EUROPE'S REVOLUTIONARY PANGS were felt in America, too, if in diluted form. The parents of Melville Louis Kossuth Dewey, in fact, named their son after after the Hungarian reformer Lajos Kossuth, who in exile after his country's 1848 revolution proved immensely popular as a lecturer. Social upheavals across Europe in that year seemed to promise an end to monarchies, and for a time they captured the imagination of Americans predisposed to judge hereditary rulers harshly. Revolutionaries were especially

valued, however, in the northwestern corner of upstate New York where Dewey was born in 1851; it is still called the Burned-over District, for the number of religious revolutions, starting with Mormonism, that have kindled their first flames in the area. As a proponent of simplified spelling, Dewey eventually dropped his foreign-inspired middle name and shortened the spelling of his given name to Melvil. But as a librarian, educator, and social reformer, he would embody the fervor and moral certitude of the Burned-over District in all its contradictory impulses.

Young Melville's own ambitions were sparked by a real fire. When his school caught fire in 1868, Dewey found himself rescuing books from the smoldering library, inhaling a great deal of smoke in the process. The deep cough he developed afterward led his doctor to conclude that he would be dead within two years. According to his biographer Wayne Wiegand, this early awareness of imminent death spurred an interest in time-saving that lasted the rest of Dewey's life, and provided the pattern for all his reforms. In everything from the training of library staff to the shelving of books, efficiency was Dewey's lodestone. Efficiency became his obsession; he championed phonetic spelling, shorthand, and the metric system, believing that the key to unlocking enormous resources of time resided in a rationalizing simplicity.

Dewey's greatest contribution—the one for which he is best known—came while he was still a student at Amherst College. Working as a library assistant, Dewey found himself frustrated by the collection's disorganization. He set about devising a system by which he might bring order to the books. The concern for classification itself did not originate with Dewey; indeed, it was a main topic among librarians of the day. Libraries were growing rapidly. The old system, in which each book was assigned a fixed spot on a shelf, would no longer do; each new addition of books required an over-

haul of the entire catalog. In St. Louis, William Torrey Harris had hit upon the idea of classifying not the books but the knowledge they contained; such a system provided a scheme of relative classification, in which books were found according to their relationship to one another. Harris followed Bacon's tripartite theory of knowledge, sorting books according to the disciplines of history, poetry, and philosophy. These branches of learning were amenable to further analysis, allowing an elaboration of the structure of knowledge that would cover all works of the mind. Although intellectuals had known and used such classificatory schemes since the Middle Ages, they had applied them to libraries only rarely, and typically in sketchy and general terms (the Vatican Library, with its tables divided according to the sacred and the profane, provides an example of one such rough scheme). In nineteenth-century libraries, meanwhile, systems had been developed like that used by the British Museum, in which the shelves were given numerical "names" that could be more or less arbitrarily divided up to note the location of specific books. Dewey's innovation was to marry the two systems, the epistemological and the numerical. The numbers didn't just designate a shelving system; they differentiated among fields of knowledge. Thus he joined the analytical simplicity of decimal numbers to an intuitive scheme of knowledge, one that would fluidly accommodate all the books ever written, and all the books that could be written as well.

But the "decimal classification," for all its manifold impact on libraries and our experience of them, hardly exhausts Dewey's influence on the library world. Indeed, nearly every aspect of it bears his stamp: he pioneered the systematic education of librarians, founding the first library school at Columbia in 1889; he launched a company, the Library Bureau, to peddle furniture and office supplies (and an entire, efficiency-minded aesthetic of interior design) to libraries big and small; in helping to found the American Library Association, he

set standards for the profession, both internal (that is to say, in terms of expected education, ethics, and standards of work) and external (the role of the librarian in society as a whole). Dewey's vigor, zeal, and indomitable personality contributed as much as the classification that bears his name to making him the most famous librarian of his or any other time. In many respects, this is unfortunate, for Dewey's obsession with efficiency, his reliance on the mandate of authority and hierarchy, and his sociocultural and religious prejudices affected the development of the library in ways that haunt it to this day.

In a sense, Dewey could be called the John Adams of the American library movement. He combined Adams's pugnacious determination and strength in political battle with a sense of right and duty to authority. When the first meeting of the American Library Association (ALA) convened in 1876, Dewey was present; at twenty-five, he was the youngest member of a group that included the Boston Public Library director Justin Winsor (later Librarian of Harvard College) and William Frederick Poole, author of *Poole's Index to Periodical Literature*, the first such resource. From the start, Dewey strove to define the profession and the work of the association in his own efficiency-minded terms—often in sharp distinction to the vision put forth by scholar-librarians like Winsor and Poole. He shared their vision of the importance of reading to social progress, but his views of how gains were to be made could hardly have been more different from theirs.

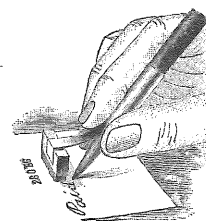
At the conference, the scholar-librarians discussed what kinds of readers the library might properly host, and what kinds of books those readers should be permitted to use. Such emphasis was new for librarians. Previously, the extent and nature of collections was pretty well understood: it was part of the cultural patrimony handed down from antiquity. But now new kinds of books were being produced, as publishers took advantage of cheap paper and mass pro-

duction methods to reach out and create new readers for their wares. The reform-minded librarians wished to interpose themselves between the masses and the books, to provide guidance in appropriate kinds of reading. Dewey agreed with this motive. But he felt that to achieve it, libraries needed to focus less on the titles of the books they chose and more on the ways in which they organized those books and made them available. To a very great extent, this was a matter of the standardization of everything: not only the cataloging schemes but the size of cards and cabinets used in catalogs should be the same in all libraries. As Dewey wrote in the first issue of the *American Library Journal*, "[c]ataloguing, indexing, and the score of things which admit it, are to be done *once* for all the libraries, at a vast reduction to each institution. . . . [A] much larger percentage of the income is therefore made available for the books." In essence, though, Dewey was thinking about libraries everywhere, and indeed he hoped libraries would be established in even the smallest communities to serve the most marginal populations. He really had a single, ideal library in mind. As his biographer Wiegand phrases it, "he was convinced the best way to maximize the library's potential was to create effectively uniform collections of quality materials and increase service efficiency by standardizing internal library procedures with common forms, appliances, and rules and systems of arrangement." A visitor to a library organized along Dewey's lines finds her way around without difficulty. To Dewey, local interests and special needs were less important than the efficient movement of books into the hands of readers. And while his undying and eccentric reliance on the bromide of efficiency undeniably led libraries to greater economies—adopting not only his furniture and his system of classification but the newly invented card catalog as well—such reform came at the cost of the sort of local diversity that makes individual libraries worth visiting, and reading in.

This last innovation, the card catalog, was not Dewey's invention. Perhaps the first prominent card catalog was Edward Gibbon's inventory on playing cards. By the middle of the nineteenth century, cards were already in common use by librarians who faced unmanageably messy, addenda-added inventories. In the early part of the century, an eccentric named William Coswell was retained by Harvard College to compile a new catalog. He hit upon the idea of cutting the old catalogs into strips and sorting the individual entries into groups by subject. This work became the basis of a "slip catalog" that made the librarian's yearly review of the collection much easier. Harvard did not use cards to make a public catalog—the first card catalog, in fact, as we think of it today—until 1860. The use of cards quickly caught on, however, and became standardized; the pages of Dewey's *Library Bureau Catalog* are stuffed with cards, cases, specialized typewriters, and other tools for the maintenance of card catalogs.

But Dewey sought to standardize not only catalogs but all aspects of the library experience. Again, it's among the pages of the Library Bureau's *Catalog* that Dewey's controlling vision reveals itself: here are the tables, the map stands, the shelves, the charge desks and date stamps, the inkwells and the pens, which the turn-of-the-century librarian could depend upon to furnish the most efficient library possible. Chairs exhibit simple, elegant lines, with narrow, unadorned legs and open structure to prevent the collection of dust beneath the seat. Patented bookshelves, braces, and labels made the browsing of books uniform from library to library. Under Dewey's inspiration, the tools of library economy proliferated into a host of specialized labels, pockets, stationery, pen nibs, and sundry other supplies. The catalog provided the means to turn any drowsy village library into an efficient engine for putting books into people's hands, an early machine age reader's utopia.

49



26h. Pencil Dater. A movable pad dater attached to a lead pencil; a slight motion of the hand stamps the date much plainer than it can be written, without removing the hand from the pencil. Of great service at the loan desk, where books must be charged rapidly. Devised at the Milwaukee Public Library, and adopted by many others.

Price, dater and L. B. dates, complete, 75c.

26i2. L. B. Accession and Numbering Stamp. Used in library work for registering the accession number in books, on cards, and elsewhere, and in banks and commercial offices for numbering checks, stock certificates, etc. This machine is very exact in its operation. The figures shift automatically one number higher at each impression, as required for consecutive numbering or paging, or it can be instantly adjusted to print each number twice, or to repeat the same number indefinitely. Made specially for us. We recommend them as the best obtainable.

Selection can be made from the following face type:—

d) №1234567890

e) №1234567890

f) №1234567890

g) №1234567890

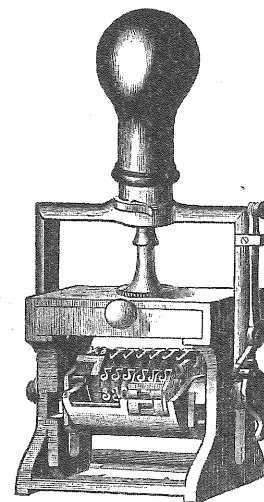
h) №1234567890

PRICES.

4-wheel Machine, numbering from 1 to 9999, . . .	\$25.00
5-wheel " " 99999, . . .	30.00
6-wheel " " 999999, . . .	35.00

26i3. D. C. Numbering Stamp. For users of the Decimal Classification a special stamp has been made, providing for two decimals; i. e. for five figures of the classification. Used for printing the class numbers on cards, book plates, and labels. It has not only proved a genuine labor-saver, but adds uniformity and legibility to the catalog.

Price, 26i3 5-wheel, D. C. Stamp . . . \$30.00



A slight motion of the hand. Labor-saving devices depicted in the Library Bureau's 1890 Catalog. Widener Library B 7770.8.5.

One of the Library Bureau *Catalog's* most striking details, however, is its organization. Like the books in Dewey's libraries, the products in his mercantile catalogs also conformed to the decimal system. A table at the front listed not the pages on which newspaper wands, catalog card typewriters, and atlas stands could be found, but their respective classifications. The 20s, for example, were devoted to "Technical Fittings." Within the 20s, stamps and daters were accorded the 26s; from there, the system turns alphabetical. As in the library, the class system in the catalog frustrated the reader, but with a purpose: to reward and encourage browsing instead. Other library reformers talked about the similarity between the library reader and the shopper; for Dewey, this was no metaphor.

Dewey's attitude toward women provides another example of his mixed impact on the library world. The Boston Athenaeum had been the first library to employ women in 1857; this was yet another innovation Dewey seized upon and made his own. The school he founded at Columbia, the School of Library Economy, admitted women to its first class. Dewey took this step without consulting the university trustees, and it was the single most important factor in their decision to close the school just two years later (Dewey moved the school to the state university at Albany). In superficial retrospect, the decision looks like a pioneer move in women's rights. But as his biographer Wiegand points out, Dewey actually used the admittance of women to the college to the same end he used their hiring in the library: to define the profession down. Women were already socially subordinate to the men who filled faculty roles; for Dewey, this subordination nicely mirrored the professional subordination of librarians to professors and other experts—a subordination he deemed necessary to the efficient workings of the library. While his colleagues in the ALA cultivated the authority to direct the reading of their patrons, Dewey eschewed this mandate. Library workers, after

all, were far too busy cataloging books and putting them in patrons' hands to trouble themselves with the choosing of books. As Wiegand puts it, Dewey didn't realize that he effectively "robbed librarianship of a direct claim to the 'authority' to determine 'best reading,' thus significantly limiting its power in the world of professions."

For other librarians of Dewey's time, by contrast, optimism about their calling—their authority to determine "best reading"—was paramount. Even outside the circle of the profession, the Promethean impulse to improve the cultural lot of all mankind had already manifested itself as an ethical imperative to manage the flow of books into readers' hands. No less a figure than Ralph Waldo Emerson concerned himself with the challenges students, like all new readers, faced in the nineteenth century's burgeoning library. Writing in a report to Harvard's trustees in 1868, Emerson noted that a new figure, a "Professor of Books," was needed to serve as guide within the labyrinth of groaning shelves. Students flee the library, he wrote,

repelled by the multitude of books which speak to them of their own ignorance,—their very multitude concealing from the gazing youth . . . the very information & learning he wants. Would some kind scholar take pity on his sincere curiosity, & . . . guide him to the class of works & presently to the precise author who has written as for him alone. Could not a gentleman be found to occupy a desk . . . as the *Library Counsellor*, to whom the Librarian could refer inquiries on authors & subjects?

Emerson's pity for the plight of the Harvard College student mirrors the concern of nineteenth-century librarians for all lost readers. And just as mythology tells us how Prometheus's pity was born of his love for mankind, so do the myths contained in the very

first volume of the *American Library Journal* offer oracular visions of librarians laboring to shape the experiences and, ultimately, the minds of readers.

Americans through the Colonial and Federal periods were highly literate. In 1731, Benjamin Franklin and members of his "Junto," a Philadelphia literary society, formed the Library Company, offering access to books for the community; the Boston Athenaeum was founded in 1807. Throughout this time, libraries and literary circles sprang up in cities large and small, some wildly democratic, others self-consciously elitist. But American society grew and changed in the early 1800s; by midcentury, the descendants of those early literati were as concerned as their European counterparts with a perceived decline in the reading standards of the public at large.

Charles Francis Adams, for instance, who administered the public library in Quincy, Massachusetts, strikes a familiar note when he reminds his colleagues that the common schools have taught the public "to read, but [not] *how* to read." The dangers to libraries presented by this unmoored proficiency were clear. In an article in the inaugural issue of the *American Library Journal*, Adams describes how the opportunities the free library offers will overwhelm the masses; dismayed by the variety of reading material, unprepared to find and read the best and most beautiful books, they will depart unfulfilled and take their potential with them. In depicting the danger and the difficulty, Adams adopts the metaphor of addiction. "It is so very easy," he says, "and so very pleasant too, to read only books which lead to nothing, light and interesting books, and the more the better, that it is almost as difficult to wean ourselves from it as from the habit of chewing tobacco to excess, or of smoking the whole time, or of depending for stimulus upon tea or coffee or spirits."

In the same issue, William Frederick Poole (who ran the Chicago Public Library) also draws a parallel between the smoking

and reading habits. To Poole, however, the tobacco reference was not entirely negative. "I smoked tobacco and read Milton at the same time," he declares, "and for the same motive: to find out what was the recondite charm in them that gave my father so much pleasure." But too many people, Poole admits, are dissuaded by that first unpleasant impression of tobacco from any further consideration of its charms. So it is with reading—too early a diet of overly strong stuff, and the new reader will soon be an ex-reader. However Poole and Adams may have differed over tobacco, they are in complete agreement about the nature and development of habits of reading—against an intellectual elite who hold the new library in contempt. It doesn't have enough good books, the elite might say; it doesn't have enough of *our* books. Indeed, there aren't enough such books, and the elite will never write them fast enough, to survive dilution in the sea of the cheap, the tawdry, the "highly seasoned." But Poole reminds elite readers that their own tastes were not always so recondite.

The scholar, in his pride of intellect, forgets the progressive steps he took in his own mental development—the stories read to him in the nursery, the boy's book of adventure in which he revelled with delight, and the sentimental novel over which he shed tears in his youth. [He] supposes that the masses will read books of his standard if they were not supplied with the books to which he objects; but he is mistaken. Shut up to this choice, they will read no books.

Later he writes,

I have never met a person of much literary culture who would not confess that at some period in his life, usually in his youth, he had read novels excessively. . . . My observation . . . has confirmed me

in the belief that there is in the mental development of every person who later attains to literary culture a limited period when he craves novel-reading; and perhaps reads novels to excess; but from which, if the desire be gratified, he passes safely out into broader fields of study, and this craving never returns to him in its original form.

Here, the ontogeny of elite readers—the growth and development of their literary habit—suggests to Poole a whole ontology of reading in its ideal form. The vast generic range of reading in the nineteenth century, which publishers and entrepreneurial authors had turned into a kind of literary great chain of being reflecting the levels and stations of society and gender, is transformed here into a developmental process undergone by the individual reader under the management of the librarian. As the scholar began with nursery tales and progressed through adventure stories, romances, biography, travel, and history, so will the new readers develop, and their society along with them. And the correct parsing of each reader's place in this developmental scale is the special work of the librarian, the role he plays in patrons' lives. Nurses raise infants; librarians raise library patrons. Readers read books; librarians read readers.

In "The Qualifications of a Librarian," Lloyd P. Smith, of the Philadelphia Library Company, outlines drives and talents that fit the Promethean prototype. The librarian he describes is an intellectual demiurge, uniquely prepared to process the clay of untutored readers into the precious metals of a cultured elite. Learned in classical and modern languages, abreast of the latest scholarship across specialties, wise in the ways of attracting donors, firm in discipline and generous in amiability, Smith's librarian above all is a "*helluo librorum*, a devourer of literature." No "teacher[s] wanting discipline" need apply. And these qualities are largely a matter of inheritance, as Smith

tells us in another fit of Latinity: "*Custos librorum nascitur, non fit*. The love of literature . . . must be in the breed; a man must belong to the Brahmin caste." And what is the Brahmin in the late nineteenth century but a Titan in the mythological mold—a power of old, who stands between the people, on the one hand, and the captains of industry and administrators of a government ever more comprehensive, ramified, and intrusive, on the other. Smith's librarian may be a failed vicar or untenured professor, but for all his failings he is a man of science and learning, and culture is his birthright. This is the Prometheus who will bring the light of learning to the masses. To Smith, all the talents of this class must be brought to bear on the problems of setting a whole culture of readers right. All his tools are put to use in the pursuit of a single ideal, to make all reading serve an overarching purpose: the coordinated progress of society and the individual within it.

Perhaps the most magnificent imagining of the librarian's power to mold the readers in his charge comes in the form of a kind of dramatic manifesto by Samuel S. Green of the Worcester Free Public Library, in his essay "Personal Relations between Librarians and Readers." Green's narrative is episodic, minimalist: no more than a series of vignettes taken from a typical day in the librarian's life. In the character of his librarian, Green distills all the progressive zeal of Winsor, the good-hearted brio of Poole, and the patrician gravitas of Smith.

First, know your customer. "When scholars and persons of high social position [the old patrons of the library, in both senses of the word] come to a library, they have confidence enough. . . . Modest men in the humbler walks of life, and well-trained boys and girls, need encouragement before they become ready to say freely what they want." In the later episodes in the life of Green's librarian, however, it becomes clear that the problem isn't one of timidity but one

of wisdom. It isn't that they can't utter what they want; in truth, they don't know what they need. And it's up to the librarian to remedy the deficiency. When craftsmen come to the library, they'll be looking for patterns and pictures; know the standard sources, and offer them up without undue comment. When a schoolgirl drops in looking for information about the origin of the yard measure, however, more pedagogical pressure should be applied, though lightly; only point the way to the likeliest sources, wait for the young reader to go astray, and then set her right. By such gentle guidance and experimentation, she will learn, in time, to find the way on her own. And yet for a citizen building a house, who is "crowded by business, but still glad to spend a single hour in the library," the approach is different: "the librarian must get the books which contain the desired information, and hand them to the reader open to the proper pages." The librarian is sensitive to the needs and capacities of his clients. Even in political disputes, Green makes clear how the librarian's offer of the right work to the right disputant might clear the way to resolution. Custodian of a new kind of library, he should keep his hand invisible even as it guides the progress of the community as a whole, his finger on the pulse of political and economic as well as cultural and literary needs and tastes. And sometimes, the librarian's own vast store of knowledge will suffice, without recourse to the collections of the library. " 'Is it true,' inquires a young lady, 'that the little bust we see so often, and which is generally called "Clyte," should be called "Clytie"?' " The librarian answers 'Yes.' " Surely, the librarian needed to consult no dictionaries to remember that Clytie was the nymph who, secretly loving Apollo, gazed so intently at the sun's passage through the sky that she turned into the heliotrope.

Like Henry Higgins in *My Fair Lady*, the librarian knows with the first word from a reader's mouth precisely the hamlet, neighborhood, or street he or she hails from in the geography of the intel-

lect. All roads from those diverse compass points lead, however, to the same eternal city, that of learning, progress, and refined sensibility. By gaining the "respect and confidence" of this disparate mass of readers, the librarian is granted "opportunities of stimulating the love of study"; "you find out what books the actual users of the library need," and make the library more popular in the community thereby. The books of the library "have been provided for the use of persons of differing degrees of refinement and moral susceptibility, and for those who occupy mental planes of various attitudes." To Smith's catalog of qualifications, we must then add a razor-sharp social intelligence and awareness of the vagaries of human development.

Once again, this whole arsenal is brought to bear on a single problem: people don't read the right sort of books. The library is devoted to solving this ill, by any means necessary. "Place in the circulating department one of the most accomplished persons in the corps of your assistants," Green writes,

some cultivated woman, for instance, who heartily enjoys works of the imagination, but whose taste is educated. . . . It is well if there is a vein of philanthropy in her composition. . . . Let the assistant, then, have some regular work, but such employment as she can at once lay aside when her aid is asked for in picking out books to read. . . . [L]et her aim at providing every person who applies for aid with the best book he is willing to read.

"*The best book he is willing to read*"—and if it takes a pretty assistant to induce him to read it, it's just as well. No inducement is out of bounds; persistence is the key. "A librarian should be as unwilling to allow an inquirer to leave the library with his question unanswered as a shop-keeper is to have a customer go out of his store without making a purchase."

Like Smith, Green imagines a librarian in the patrician mold. But it's a patrician poised on the brink of a rupture between old and new, between the *custos librorum* of old and the information social worker of modernity. Contemporary librarians similarly are caught between the cultural inspirations of the old and the professional aspirations of the new. "Librarianship," begins the anonymous author of "Continuity," which appeared in an 1890 issue of *Harper's Weekly*, "offers a better field for mental gymnastics than any other profession." As we quickly discover, though, our hero is not a bit happy about it. He has neither the time nor the inclination to midwife a reader's inchoate urges into rarefied cultural tastes. This librarian is too busy for such heady intimacies; for while he sits at the front desk serving his patrons' every whim, he's also "cataloguing the four thousand and tenth of an interminable series of French plays." Despite this initial chagrin, the librarian seems to prefer this task to the answering of patrons' questions. When a "drove of unbroken sophomores comes prancing into the library," his wits are "jogged out of Paris and across a half-century," back from the milieu of Molière and into progressive library land. It's immediately clear that this librarian has no interest in the journey. Enter the sophomores:

"Say, will you please give me a chart of Long Island Sound?"

"Say, may I have all my books renewed?"

"Say, can you tell me where Milton speaks of the Golden Chersonese?"

"Say, will you show me something on the woodchuck?"

"Say, is Professor Scribner in?"

This drove of sophomores seems tolerably well broken: they are, after all, unfailingly, if chorally, polite. But as the narrator struggles to master his disdain, he makes clear how deep is the divide

between the two realms of his work: on the one hand, he revels in bibliographical, scholarly detective work; on the other, he is forced to play the part of the public servant, the functionary, the scrivener chained to the reference desk.

The sophomores depart, and the librarian returns to his bibliographical reveries: "here," he writes, "is a thin little pamphlet called *Les suites d'un mariage de raison*. . . . par MM. Dartois, Leon Brunswick et Lhéric [*sic*]. To catalogue it I must first of all identify authors. . . ." Soon, however, more patrons interrupt—and in "Continuity" the patrons are idiots, sharps, and malcontents. One man is trying to help his landlady raise gamecocks. Another needs help deciphering his own handwriting. A student thinks that Francis Bacon's *New Atlantis* is a magazine article, while another wants the librarian to write his thesis on Byron for him. Someone asks whether the librarian has any special "litterury" taste; another wants him to figure his board bill for him.

Despite the continual snapping of these vultures at his liver, the librarian slogs on. Eventually, he convinces himself that his playwright, Lhéric, is in fact one Lévy, pinpointing the crucial evidence as the waning sunlight that "breaks sorrowfully . . . through painted panes" mingles with the library's swirling dust. With this, the narrator gives his workplace the aura of a church—one in which the confessions beat the clergy about the head all day long and where no relief is to be found from the chanting of the psalms. "The little French play is finally catalogued," he writes in conclusion.

Author card, subject card, cross references, and all. Dartois and the brothers Lévy prove to have been quite fecund, and erelong their names as joint authors are intricately woven into the main catalogue. Then one day I discover by chance that Dartois really wrote his name François Victor Armand d'Artois de Bournonville, and I have all that work to go over again.

The librarian of this *Harper's* piece is the mirror image of the ideal presented by pioneers like Poole and Winsor. Presented—or beset—with the same set of problems, he refuses to convert the gamey scoffers' challenges into professional opportunities. Instead, he embraces all the vices the pioneers complained of in librarians of old: jealousy, disdain, resentment at his own low station in the transformed library—where the books are free to all, even the amnesiac, the impolitic, and the downright illiterate. Painfully aware of the changed context of library service, he refuses to fit into the progressive mold the profession offers.

As the Library Bureau *Catalog* for 1890 points out, the chief aim of the library's catalog is to help patrons find the books they want as quickly as possible. That's just what Panizzi, the first Promethean librarian, asserted when he began reforming the catalog of the British Museum at the beginning of the nineteenth century. But for this librarian at the end of the century, cataloging remains an end in itself, and the readers' searches for the right books only and always get in the way.

An earlier generation of his colleagues and mentors had developed the professional mythology by reimagining class-based differences in reading taste (which were already imaginary—for rich and poor alike enjoy the cheap, the tawdry, and the “highly seasoned”) as stages in a developmental scheme. In the process, they reimagined themselves as intellectual physicians who would taxonomize the developmental processes of readers, and diagnose and treat their aberrations. In “Continuity,” however, all that progressive mythology is jettisoned. What remains is a social atomism in which each reader is cut off from others, and the librarian cut off from them all. The characters of “Continuity” are mired in their own foibles, and the librarian is distinctly modern in his awareness of this as he toils to create catalogs for readers who lack the intellectual wherewithal to

make use of them. Librarians couldn't hope to guide the people in their use of such titanic gifts as literacy and access to information. Ultimately, they could hardly lend a hand in the shaping of cultural tastes, for these move at the whim of larger and more climatic forces: all the manifold urges, distractions, and obstructions of modern life.