

Animadversions on the library and catalogues of the British Museum. A reply to Mr. Panizzi's statement; and a correspondence with that officer and the Trustees.

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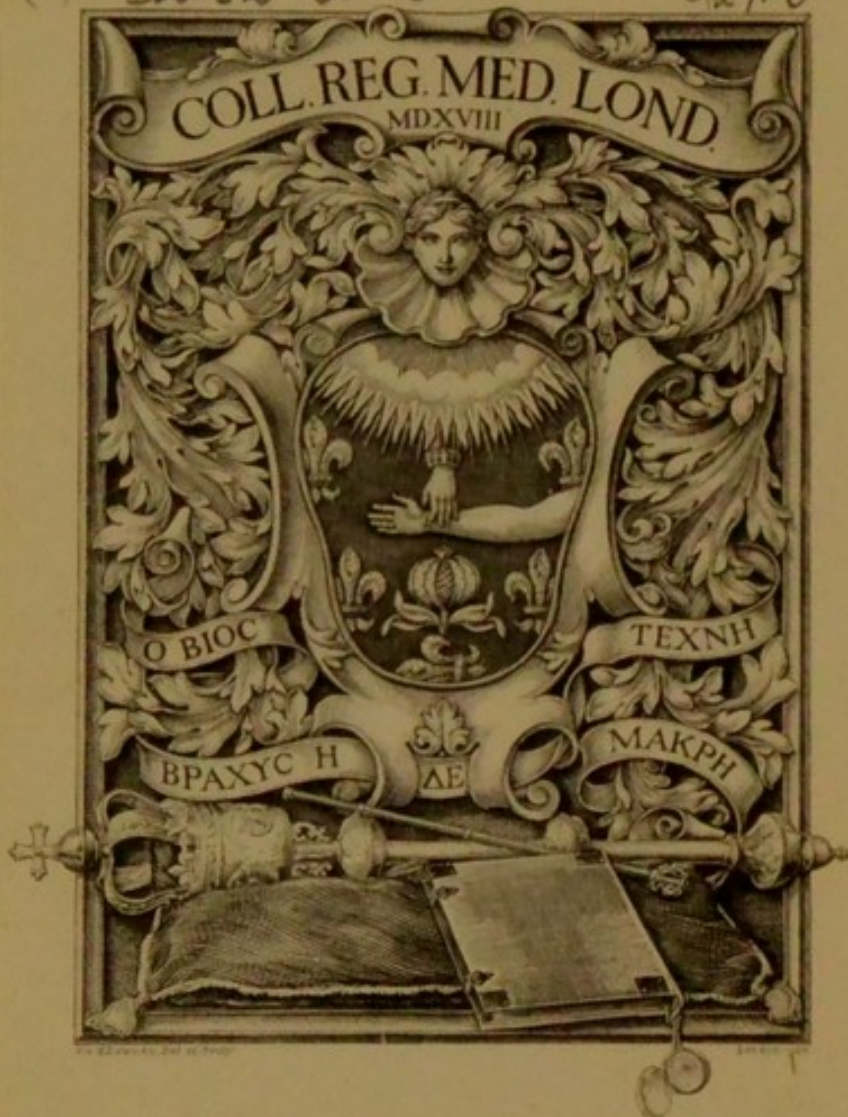


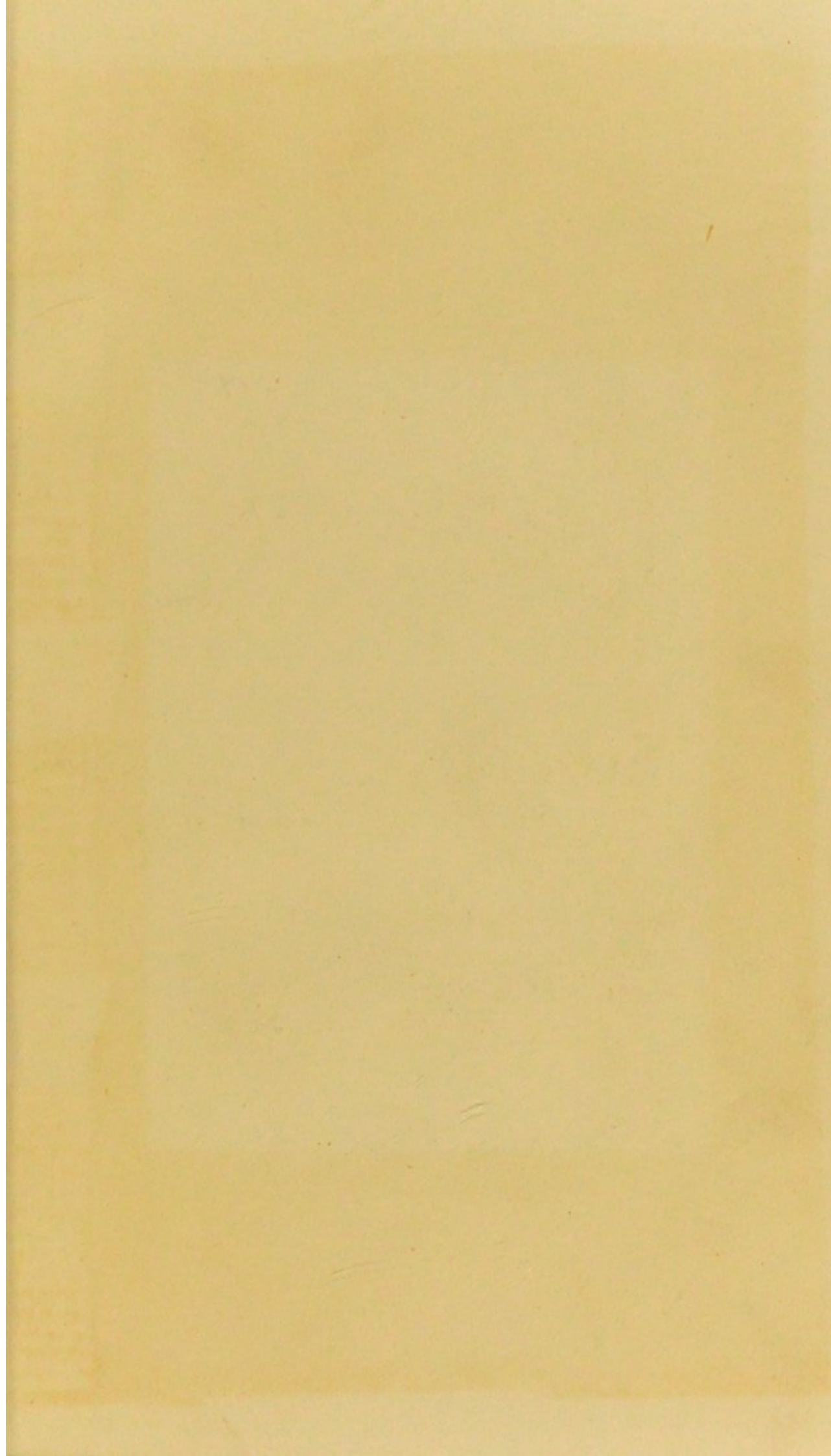
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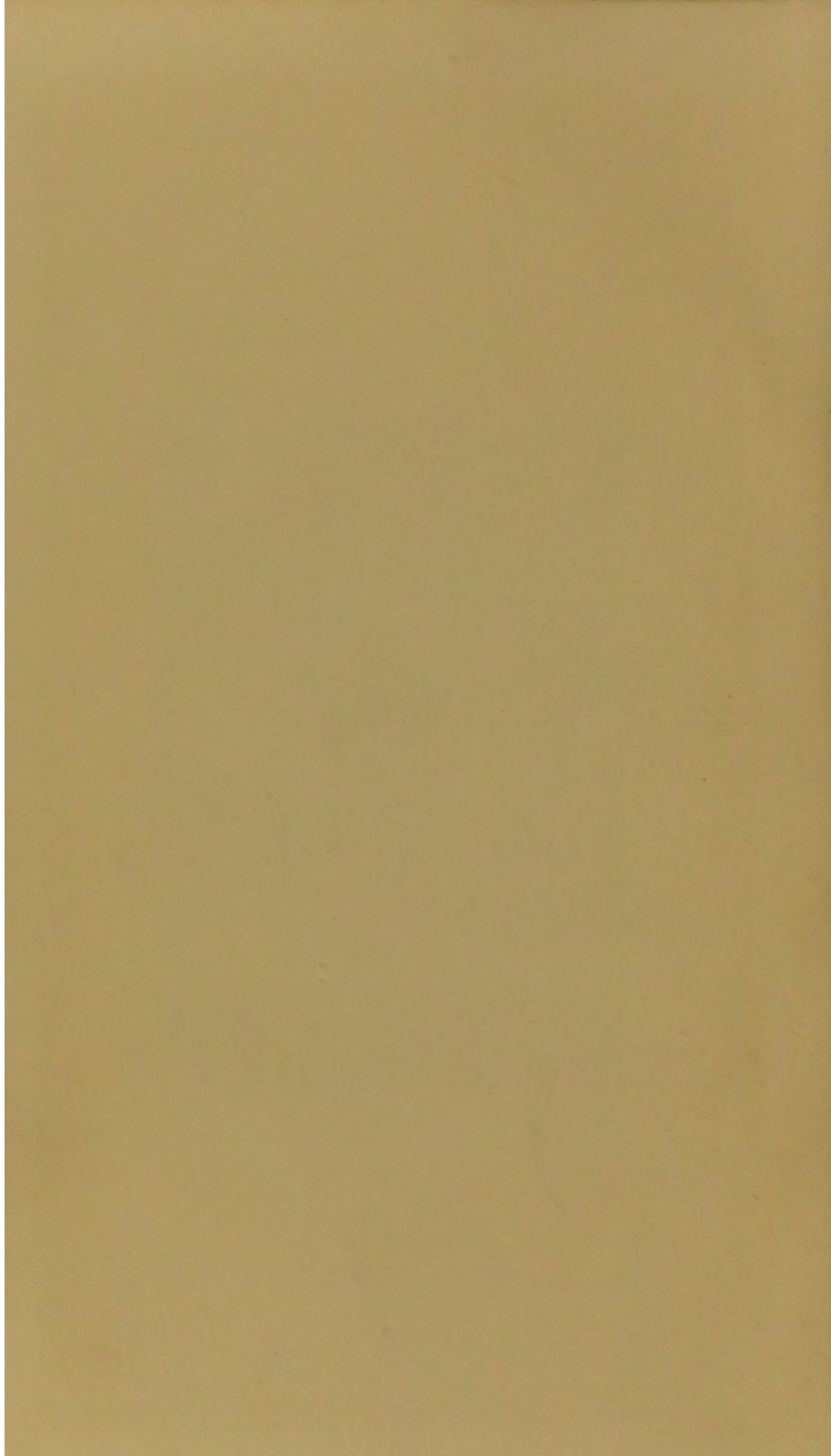


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The Right Honourable
John Wilson Croker
Esq.

ANIMADVERSIONS ON THE
LIBRARY AND CATALOGUES OF
THE BRITISH MUSEUM.

A REPLY TO MR. PANIZZII'S STATEMENT;
AND A CORRESPONDENCE WITH THAT
OFFICER AND THE TRUSTEES.

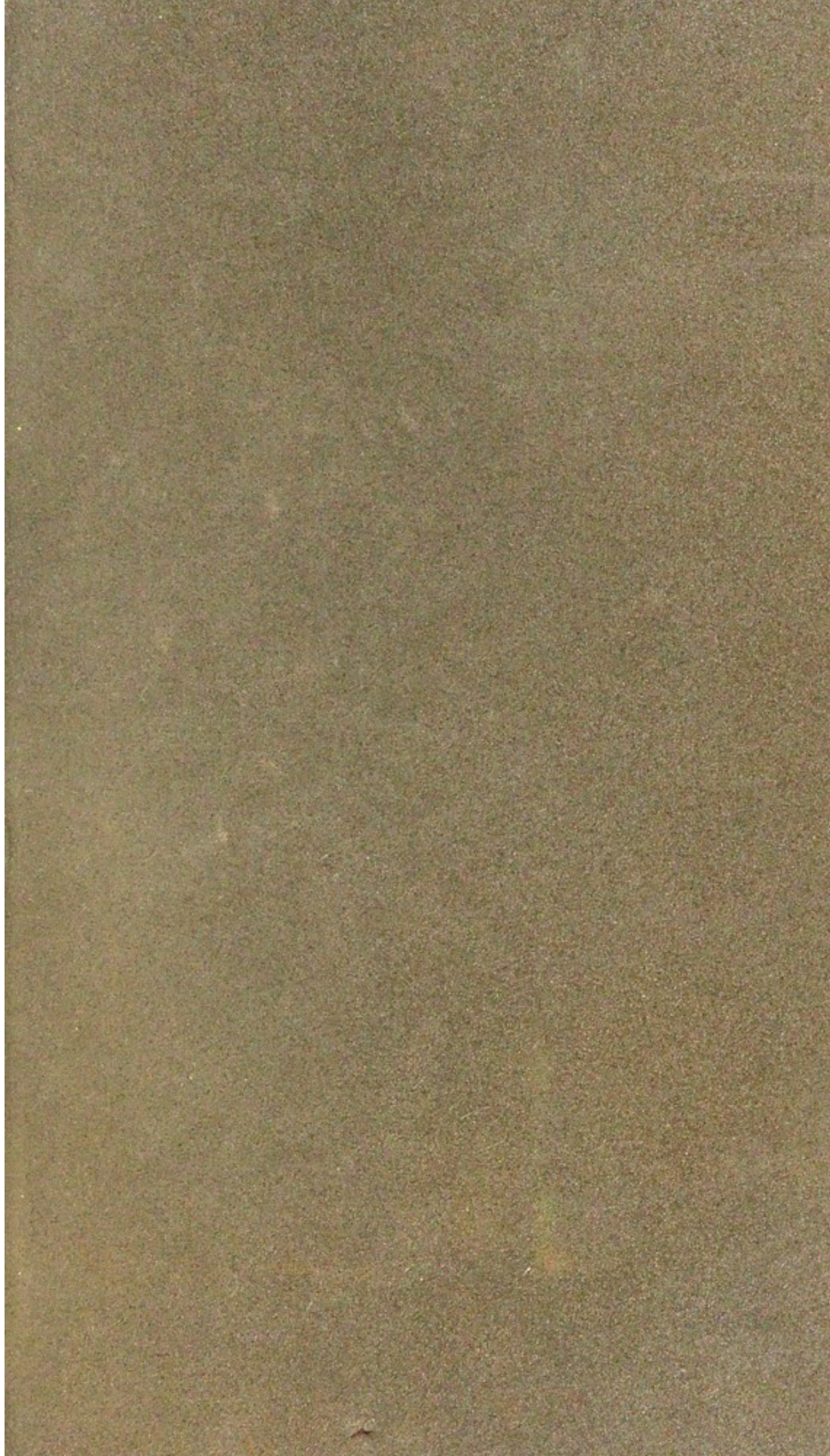
BY SIR HARRIS NICOLAS.

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FIFTEEN years ago, when I was attacked in a pamphlet for my efforts to open the Record Offices to the Public, and to save the Country a wasteful expenditure of £10,000 per annum (efforts which were at length completely successful, but which caused me great expense and loss of time, and were *rewarded* by the discontinuance of an important historical work,* which I was most anxious to complete),—I said, “Whenever an individual attempts to expose abuses, he must expect that his motives will be impugned, and his conduct misrepresented by those who are interested in the existing system;” adding, “that no rational person can be surprised that, in the absence of more satisfactory grounds of defence, recourse is had to personal calumnies.”

A more prudent man, and one more alive to his own interests than to those of the Public, would, perhaps, have been satisfied with the benefit he had conferred upon the Country by those efforts; and might, too, have learnt that such exertions tend to his own injury. Be it, however, wise or unwise in relation to myself, I cannot see an essential part of a great National Institution mismanaged, and the

* “Proceedings and Ordinances of the Privy Council of England,” in seven volumes, ending with part of the reign of Henry the Eighth. This work was printed by the Record Commission, and its Editor received £150 for each volume.

Public money wasted, without striving to improve the one and prevent the other.

It has long been my opinion that the Regulations by which the Readers obtain books in the British Museum, are extremely inconvenient; and I had suffered so much from the impediments and delay, that I, as well as others, have been almost driven from the Library. I made no effort, however, on the subject, because I wished to abstain if possible, from another controversy with well-paid Functionaries, and irresponsible Boards.

Two circumstances have lately compelled me to depart from that resolution; namely, the necessity of constantly referring to the Library for a "*History of the Navy*," on which I am engaged; and the incredible statement of Mr. Panizzi, the Keeper of the Printed Books, which has been recently laid before Parliament, that the new Catalogue, which has been for some years in progress, and which is so necessary to students, will not be completed, in *manuscript* even, until the year 1854; that it will then be sixteen years in arrear, and that, in his opinion, there are no means by which its completion can be expedited!

This information induced me to examine the specimen of the new Catalogue, afforded by the first volume, on which much time and a large part of the Parliamentary grants have been expended.

I was on friendly terms with Mr. Panizzi, and am still so with every other Officer of the Museum, and am personally known to many of the Trustees. It is, therefore, impossible that I could have

any private, still less any unworthy motive, for bringing the subject before the Public.

The "Spectator" newspaper appeared, from its literary character, its influential circulation, and high respectability, to be the most convenient place in which to submit my observations; and accordingly three articles were severally printed in it on the 16th, 23rd, and 30th of May. With those articles, of which I was well known, at the British Museum, to be the writer, the subject would probably, so far as I was concerned, have ended, but for the following circumstance.

On the day after the first of those articles was published, a case of more than usual neglect in the delivery of a book having occurred to me, I complained of it in writing to Mr. Panizzi. To my great surprise he justified the neglect, offering, if I were dissatisfied with his opinion, to refer my complaint to the Trustees. I told him I certainly was not satisfied, but that he might do as he pleased about referring to the Trustees. He then wrote to tell me he should submit my letters to them. Here, again, the matter might and ought to have ended.

For a crafty object of his own, Mr. Panizzi persisted in keeping up his correspondence with me, and it was laid before the Trustees. In the mean while, the two other articles had appeared in the "Spectator;" and on the day the last of them was published, I forwarded them, as I had promised, to Mr. Panizzi, "from the author."

While this correspondence was under the consideration of the Trustees, and before they had de-

cided on my complaint, their Officer thought it consistent with his duty to print the whole of it; and not only to prefix to it his defence of the act complained of, but to attack me in a personal and offensive manner. A few days after, I received a letter from the Secretary to the Trustees, stating, in effect, that the Trustees entirely approved of Mr. Panizzi's answer to me.

However inconvenient the expense and loss of time in bringing the question before the Public may be,—and both are very inconvenient,—it seems imperative upon me to do so. It is a *public* question whether a gentleman is to be misrepresented and insulted by a Public Officer in a pamphlet, because he complains of neglect in that Officer's department, or because he considers an important work is imperfectly executed, or improperly delayed. It is a *public* question whether the authorities who sanction these measures, and uphold their author, are performing the duty they have undertaken. It is a *public* question whether an Institution, intended and liberally supported by the Country for the advancement of Science, Literature, and Art, is to be in any degree perverted from that design by the captious and obstructive spirit of a servant of the Establishment. It is not altogether a *personal* question, whether a man who has long suffered from having needless trouble given to him, and his time consumed by unnecessary impediments, is to be "bullied," *in terrorem*, of other complainants, by an Officer of the Institution, who conceives he may ride rough-shod over the Public, as he has long

ridden rough-shod over his Colleagues and the Trustees.

I at least, for one, will not submit to be thus treated, nor to have my efforts to benefit the Public impaired by false and injurious imputations, without laying the facts before them. To appeal to the Trustees is, as will be seen, utterly useless.

This pamphlet will contain a reprint of the papers, with some slight corrections, that appeared in the "Spectator;" and a reply to Mr. Panizzi's statement, in which my correspondence with him and with the Trustees will be introduced.

It may be proper to say a few words to account for the allusion which occurs to Mr. Panizzi's being an Italian. I admit frankly, that his misconduct is to me, an Englishman, the more unpalatable, from the fact that the offending functionary is a Foreigner. I admit as frankly, that I think it is discreditable to the Country, and disgraceful to British literature, that a Foreigner should fill a post which belongs by moral right and national feeling to some Englishman who has earned it by great literary merit. But when, through very extraordinary influence, a Foreigner is placed in such an Office, let him, from common prudence, if not from a sense of common propriety, imitate as far as he can, the candour and straight-forward habits of the people among whom he lives, and by whom he is paid. Let him act with becoming modesty; and strive by conciliatory manners, by a desire to meet their wishes, and to supply their wants, to make the literary men of England forget that he has usurped a valuable appoint-

ment, which belongs, justly, to one of themselves. Mr. Panizzi, on the contrary, has boasted even to a Committee of the House of Commons, that if any one of these laborious and ill-rewarded persons, whose time is their income, accidentally commits any error in applying for a book, it is his opinion,—the opinion, be it remembered, of a Public servant, every hour of whose day, well or ill employed, is amply remunerated by the Country,—that the book ought not, “upon principle,” to be brought to the applicant, “*although he (Mr. Panizzi) could find it.*”

Even the indiscreet and offensive course which Mr. Panizzi is pursuing might not, however, have caused so direct a reference to his origin, had not his conduct towards me on this occasion partly arisen from his not having been an Englishman; and I am, perhaps, not very tolerant of being caught in a snare constructed of materials which I had myself given him, nearly nine years ago, for a kind and generous purpose.

But while that fact explains the cause of so unusual a proceeding, his position does much, I readily admit, to excuse the morbid irritation he has displayed. He well knows that the only possible excuse for his holding the situation he fills is his supposed superior qualifications for it; and as that idea vanishes into thin air on the exposure of the preposterous plan of his *magnum opus*, the new Catalogue, and of the obstructive system of his management of the Library, he may be forgiven for being angry, though not for being uncandid and abusive.

In justice to myself, I may be permitted to add, that the articles in the *Spectator*, and my correspondence, are alike free from personalities; and that it is he himself who has forced me, by his example, to use so disagreeable a weapon; and then only after I had been deceived and attacked by him.

As Mr. Panizzi's pamphlet does not touch upon the new Catalogue, I have not commented further upon it. Upon this and other points, he says he will not "enter into a profitless discussion with *such* an adversary,"—I readily believe him; for no man ever doubted his astuteness until he published his statement. He will only "defend himself on those points," he adds, before "a competent judge;" meaning, no doubt, one of his patrons and allies among the Trustees. Perhaps he may regret he had not reserved his defence on *all* points for so *competent* and *impartial* a tribunal. *My* tribunal is *Public opinion*: he now stands arraigned at its bar, and the reader may proceed to consider the indictment, the evidence, and the defence.

1st July, 1846.

THE LIBRARY OF THE BRITISH MUSEUM.

THERE is scarcely any one object on which the advancement of Literature in England so much depends, as upon the proper management of the Library of the British Museum; and as the attention of Parliament has been recently drawn to it by the publication of a long Report on the Library by Mr. Panizzi, the Keeper of the Printed Books, this is a fitting occasion for offering some remarks on the subject.

As a preliminary and important point, it may be proper to inquire whether the constitution of the Board of Trustees is likely to create confidence in their government of the literary or scientific departments of that great Institution? Those appointments obviously require, in a majority of them at least, not merely the education and learning of a gentleman, but that practical acquaintance with the wants of literary men which authorship *only* gives, and it may be added, authorship in those humble persons who are compelled to labour (not, like the Trustees, when any of them consult the Library, in a separate room, with Officers and Attendants anxious to anticipate his wishes, but) in the Public Reading-room, subject to the trouble and difficulties which the present Keeper has

thought proper to impose. The appointment of Trustee depends partly upon choice, but much more upon accident; and though there is no Royal road to knowledge, Parliament has discovered that the selection of those who are to promote its advancement had better depend upon rank, official station, and chance, than upon any personal qualifications.

The number of Trustees is forty-eight. Of these, twenty-three are what may be termed *accidental* Trustees. The accidental Trustees are of two kinds,—first, those who hold that situation *because* they hold *another* Office of infinitely greater importance, of a totally different nature, and which occupies the greater part of their time;—namely, the Archbishop of Canterbury, Lord Chancellor, Speaker of the House of Commons, Lord President of the Council, First Lord of the Treasury, Lord Privy Seal, First Lord of the Admiralty, Lord Steward, Lord Chamberlain, the three Secretaries of State, the Bishop of London, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, the Chief Justices of the Queen's Bench and Common Pleas, Master of the Rolls, and the Attorney and Solicitor-General. The second class of *accidental* Trustees are the “Family Trustees,” that is, the representatives of persons whose collections have been given to or bought by the public for the British Museum,—the Cotton, Harley, Sloane, Towneley, Elgin, and Knight families, nine in all, and of whom four are Peers and one is the son of a Duke. The Queen appoints a Trustee in consequence of the Royal Library having been given to the Museum by King George

the Fourth; and her Majesty's present representative is the Duke of Northumberland.

Thus far, neither Literature, nor Science, nor Art has its representative; but they appear at last in the Presidents of the Royal Society, the Royal Academy, the Society of Antiquaries, and the College of Physicians; and these are certainly the most proper of the *accidental* Trustees. There is, however, yet another class of Trustees, called the Elected—*i. e.* of those who are supposed to be chosen by the others, but who are, we believe, recommended by the Crown. Of this class there are fifteen: and here, if anywhere, might be expected the names of many of the most distinguished men of science and literature in the country, even if that class were not entirely composed of such men. Accordingly, out of fifteen, there are *three* names known to Science and Literature—namely Sir John Herschel, Mr. Hallam, and Mr. W. R. Hamilton. The other Elected Trustees are the Dukes of Rutland, Hamilton, and Sutherland, the Marquis of Lansdowne, the Earls of Aberdeen, Harrowby, Derby, and Carlisle, Lord Ashburton, Sir Robert Peel, Sir Robert Inglis, and Mr. Thomas Grenville.

Such an immense majority of official and aristocratic Governors of an Institution, created and maintained by a large expenditure of the public money solely for the advancement of Literature, Science, and Art, and such a thorough contempt as it implies for those laborious persons on whom the scientific and literary reputation of the

country rests, is only the usual manifestation of the feelings of the Government and Aristocracy towards them, and to which the House of Commons has always succumbed. The anomalous constitution of the Trustees is now adverted to as an explanation of those defects in the management of the Institution which have been often pointed out in the newspapers, but which is much better known to those within its walls, though they may not deem it prudent to declare their opinions. It would be quite absurd to suppose that the high, official, and noble personages above named can bestow much, if any part, of their time on its affairs; and we ask, with sincere respect for all their other merits, how many of them are qualified or disposed to take a practical and efficient part in those infinite details which the proper administration of its concerns absolutely requires?

What is the natural and inevitable result of such an administrative body, in such an Establishment? Its government devolves on a few amateurs; and matters requiring thorough investigation, as well as profound and practical knowledge, are decided upon the representations of the Officers—the Trustees sometimes wrongly rejecting, and sometimes as wrongly adopting their suggestions, according as the subject may be a hobby, or the recommending Officer a favourite.

But the Library is the immediate object of our consideration; and we shall return to it, as there is only now space to observe, that perhaps the proverbial asinine patience of John Bull has rarely

been more calculated upon—the consequences of a governing body of amateurs and dilettanti never more glaringly shown—or the confidence of the head of a department in his power to do as he pleases more remarkably exhibited—than in the answer of the Keeper of the Printed Books to the Trustees, who after the lapse of some years, and the expenditure of much money on a new Catalogue of the Library, ventured to ask him in 1844, “At what period, according to the best calculation which under the difficulties of the case he could make, the new alphabetical Catalogue would be finished in manuscript?”—in *manuscript* only, be it observed; to which gentle inquiry they received this most satisfactory reply—“Mr. Panizzi has the honour to state, that supposing the titles, cross-references included, to amount to 800,000, (and Mr. Panizzi feels confident they will be considerably above that number,) for works in the Library previous to 1838, they cannot be written out, in conformity with the rules now adopted, before the end of 1854”!

The Public are thus coolly informed, that in about *eight years* time, they may possibly have a *manuscript* Catalogue, but which Catalogue will then be sixteen years in arrear, for it will not include any one work received in the Museum since 1838; so that, assuming from the Returns that upwards of 10,000 books, &c., all of which must be entered in a Catalogue, are added every year, the complete manuscript Catalogue in 1854 will not contain any notice of 160,000 works!—a library in themselves.

But can no means be found for expediting the completion of this monster Catalogue? The Trustees have really been sufficiently alive to ask Mr. Panizzi so remarkable a question; and, happily, it did not in the slightest degree disturb his enviable self-possession, for he very quietly "begs to say," that, "in his opinion, there are *none*"!!! It must therefore be inferred that the "rules" adopted for its compilation meet Mr. Panizzi's entire approbation, (even if the plan be not his own,) or why did he not state that they were inexpedient? and that he has as much assistance as he wishes for is evident, or he would have asked for more. Could the learned Keeper of the Printed Books have been laughing at the Trustees; or did he intend to insult the common sense of the country which has had the honour of adopting him? He will, we apprehend, find that the Public is not disposed to submit to this treatment, whatever the Trustees may do. That his influence over the Board is as unbounded as it is prejudicial, is apparent from his having actually carried his favourite point, by inducing them to suspend or to give up the printing of the new Catalogue (though one volume has been published) until the whole is completed in manuscript—will this be in 1854? or 1864? or 1900?

The plan of the Catalogue, the *ninety-one* rules for its formation, and the infinite division of titles, cross-references, &c., will be the subject of a separate notice.*

* From "The Spectator" of the 16th of May, 1846.

As a correct printed list of a great Library is indispensable for its use, we shall notice the Catalogue of the printed books in the British Museum, now in progress, before we point out the impediments that have been unnecessarily imposed upon the Public in consulting that library, or those defects in the library itself, to which attention has been recently called by Mr. Panizzi's letter to the Trustees. It may, however, be first observed, that the Catalogue actually in use in the Reading-room was printed in 1813, in seven volumes octavo;* but it is so extended by being interleaved to contain the innumerable additions since made to the library, that it now forms *forty-eight* large folio volumes. Thus, the printed part is almost lost among the additional manuscript pages; and the difficulty of referring to it may be easily imagined, when it is remembered that there is only *one* copy—that about 230 persons daily attend the Reading-room—and that no book, however small or however well known, can be obtained, unless its title, &c., (according to the regulation introduced by the present Keeper, and to which we shall on another occasion particularly advert,) has been copied from this cumbrous Catalogue. There is also a *separate* Catalogue in five folio volumes, of the books given to the public by King George the Third, so that *both* Catalogues must be examined before a person can be sure that the work he wants is not in the Museum. Indeed, so anxious, seemingly, is the Librarian to

* This useful Catalogue was made by Sir Henry Ellis with the assistance of only *one* person!

create confusion and to cause unnecessary trouble, that wherever the title of a book occurred in the general Catalogue which happens to be in the Royal collection, it is actually *struck out* ! As no explanation of the erasure is given, the reader of course infers that the book whose title is thus erased, is no longer in the Museum.

The absolute want of a new printed Catalogue which shall include *every* book in the Library, is therefore so obvious and so imperative, that no one can doubt that it ought to be completed at the earliest possible moment. Neither the exotic capriccios of a Librarian, nor the pedantic whims of a Trustee should be allowed to delay its progress ; and what the Public requires, in the first instance at least, is simply a *practical* Catalogue, having the titles or authors' names placed in alphabetical order, and not a Catalogue formed upon so abstruse a plan as to require *ninety-one* rules for its construction ; most, if not all, of which rules, occupying five folio pages, must be committed to memory, before any person can be aware under what head he will find even the commonest book in our language. The first volume of the new Catalogue, containing the letter A, (but not including any book acquired by the Library since 1838, *i. e.* during the last eight years,) has lately been published ; and to show its absurd plan, let it be supposed that a volume of the *Annual Register* is wanted. A man of plain understanding would naturally expect to find it under "Annual : " or, failing that, certainly under "Register." So direct

a process would, however, be inconsistent with this recondite compilation ; for under "Annual" he finds only this notice—"Annual, *see* Periodical Publications." As to *seeing* the volume containing "Periodical Publications," it is so entirely out of the question that he might almost as well be referred to the Millennium, for who can tell when either will appear ? Wishing, however, to learn why one of the best known and most useful publications in this country should not be entered under its proper title, he refers to the ninety-one rules ; and, having come to the eighty-first, he finds that all "Periodical Publications" are to be placed under that general head, "embracing reviews, magazines, newspapers, journals, gazettes, annuals, and all works of a similar nature, in whatever language and under whatever denomination they may be published !" Hence, the *Quarterly* and *Edinburgh Reviews*, and every kind of magazine and newspaper, printed not only in Great Britain but throughout the whole world, will be thrown together under one general head, subdivided, we presume, into countries and classes.

Common sense would suggest that the fewer general heads there may be in a large Catalogue the better ; and that, in these days of periodical literature, reviews, magazines, and newspapers are sufficiently generic to have each a class of its own. With a similar disregard of simplicity, all the publications of the innumerable Societies and Institutions throughout Europe are placed under the general head of "Academies." What person, wanting a

volume of the *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society*, for example, on turning to "Philosophical Transactions" would expect to be referred back to the first volume, "A," because it has pleased the Trustees to allow these works to be placed under "Academies?" As that part of the Catalogue is printed, we can easily show the folly of such general classifications of books that have nothing whatever to do with each other, not even a similarity of title, and which are not, in most cases, published by any "*Academy*," but by Societies or Clubs. The entries under "Academies, &c.," fill no less than *seventy-eight* folio pages; which are subdivided into countries, and again subdivided into cities, towns, &c. Having at last discovered that the *Philosophical Transactions* may be found among the publications of "Academies," the inquirer has next to ascertain whether the work is entered under "England" or under "Great Britain;" and he finds it under the latter. His troubles are now, he flatters himself, at an end; but alas! there is yet another subdivision, because all such books, printed in Great Britain, are entered under the name of the city or place in which the Society or Association existed. After alighting in Great Britain, he has therefore to inform himself where the Society had its habitat: in the supposed case he will of course know it was in London, but if it were a book printed by the Spalding or Surtees Society, he may have much trouble in discovering the locality, and when it is discovered he has to set out upon another journey. Passing through Aberdeen, Bath, Belfast, Cam-

bridge, Canterbury, and Dublin, back again to Edinburgh, then to Eton and Exeter, returning to Glasgow, visiting Lichfield, and touching at Liverpool, he at last (not certainly by railway) reaches London. He has then to look through eleven folio pages, filled with the publications of every imaginable Institution, such as the Army Medical Board, British Museum, Camden Society, Record Commission, &c.; and eventually, to his great joy, he finds "Royal Society," and "Philosophical Transactions!" To obtain a copy of any volume of the *Quarterly* or *Edinburgh Review*, *Monthly Review*, *Gentleman's Magazine*, &c., or *Times* or *Spectator* newspapers, or of any publication whatever of a periodical nature, a similar process must be adopted. And all this trouble, this loss of time, this turning from one folio volume to another, and looking through page after page, is to discover, not a rare nor a foreign work, but one which may be found in every circulating and in most private libraries, solely because the book is not entered under its own title.

We may be told that other Catalogues have been compiled on a similar plan: but such precedents should have been avoided instead of followed; and if a Catalogue is intended to enable persons to find the books they want with the least possible difficulty or delay, then we assert, without hesitation, that the plan which has been adopted for a Catalogue of an immense collection like that of the British Museum is not merely extremely inconvenient, but that for *practical* purposes it is perfectly absurd. But while reviews, magazines, and newspapers, are not

classed by themselves, nor their usual title made the principal entry, many words, not merely insignificant, but under which no sane man would think of seeking for a book, appear as separate titles: for example, "Accounts," because the books are called "An Account of" some place or subject: thus, under that word there are seventeen entries, consisting of "An *account* of Workhouses for employing the Poor," "An *account* of some remarkable passages in the life of a Private Gentleman," "An *account* of the constitution and security of a general Bank of Credit," "An *account* of proceedings to discover the Longitude," "An *account* of Coal-tar," &c. Now, to suppose that there are only seventeen anonymous works in the Museum the first words of the title of which are "An Account of," is impossible: hence, the plan cannot have been carried into effect. But who would look for an account of a subject under any other head than that of the subject itself, namely, in these instances—"Workhouses," "Gentleman," "Bank," "Coal-tar," "Longitude," &c. As well might anonymous books be entered under the indefinite or definite article, or under the prepositions "of," "on," "to," &c., as under such a head. To take for another example the word "Abstract,"—though there are many works called "An *Abstract*" of this or that, there is only one solitary entry under that word, and this too of a work which has no business there, but should have appeared under "Poor." There are only *two* entries under "Answer;" one of which belongs to "Pretender," and the other to "Motion."

There are only *eight* under "Appeal," not one of which should have been inserted there; and while "cross-references" abound, there is none to the printed cases of "Appeals in the House of Lords," though there is a reference to "Appeals in Prize Causes." Under "Admiral," "Admiralty," "Astrology," and "Astronomy," there are no entries whatever; whence it must be inferred, however incredible, that there is not a single anonymous work in the Museum on these fertile subjects. Under "Admiralty," there are cross-references to "England, Admiralty," "Great Britain, Admiralty," "Great Britain and Ireland, Admiralty:" hence, all the Departments of the Public service are, we suppose, to be entered under one of these *three* general heads, divided and subdivided, and filling very many pages, like "Academies" and "Periodical Publications."

Every literary person is aware that the more condensed a Catalogue can be made the more useful it will be, inasmuch as the book sought for will be the sooner discovered; to say nothing of economy of time, labour, and money, in its formation. All unnecessary statements ought therefore to be rigidly excluded: but these obvious principles have been so entirely lost sight of in the Catalogue of the British Museum Library, that a large portion of this volume is occupied with separate entries of duplicate, triplicate, or quadruplicate copies of the same work, and of the same edition. Turn, for instance, to the article "Asgill," pp. 385-386, where the words "another copy" fill no less than nineteen

distinct lines. What reader cares to know how many copies there may be of the same edition of the same work? A large part of the volume is occupied with cross-references, which, under Rule 55, are "to be divided into three classes—from name to name, from name to work, and from work to work." With respect to Periodical Publications, and Almanacks, Calendars, &c.,—which, by the by, are placed, not under their titles, but under the head "Ephemerides,"—there would seem to be no end to cross-references: for, says Rule 83,

"There shall be cross-references from the name of any author, editor, or contributor, to any of the above works, appearing in any of the title-pages of any of the volumes, as well as from the peculiar name or designation of any of the Societies, from the place at which they hold their meetings, from any place forming part of the peculiar name of a journal, almanack, calendar, &c., from the name under which such publications are generally known, to the main entries of such works."

And Rules 87 and 91 also relate to "cross-references."

These eternal cross-references are deserving of attention. They are said to be the principal cause of the delay in making the Catalogue; and they are mainly caused by the complex and injudicious plan which has been adopted. All these cross-references should be printed in volumes by themselves, and put together after the alphabetical Catalogue is finished, to which they would form a sort of *classed* index. The Catalogue was properly intended to be alphabetical; and the second Rule directs that the titles shall be arranged alphabetically, according to

the English alphabet only, under the surname of the author, whenever it appears printed in the title or in any other part of the book : and this, in the case of authors' names, (subject, however, to some arbitrary, and, we think, unwise directions—such as entering the works published by Commoners, who afterwards became Peers, not under the *name* in the *title-page*, but under that of the title they afterwards obtained,)* has been done. Why, then, was not the same principle adopted respecting anonymous books, reviews, works printed by Societies, &c., by placing them under their titles, instead of arranging them under the general heads of “Academies,” “Periodical Publications,” “Ephemerides,” &c.? The plan is therefore inconsistent, for the Catalogue is alphabetical with respect to authors, and classed with respect to some of the subjects; whereas, were

* “Rule 14. Surnames of noblemen, though not expressed in the book, to be ascertained and written out as the heading of the entry. A person who has assumed titles not generally acknowledged, to have the words ‘calling himself’ between brackets, to precede the assumed title.

“Rule 17. An author's rank in society, in cases in which he enjoyed any honorary distinction or office for life, not lower than that of Knight, Admiral, or General, to be stated in Italics. Younger sons of Dukes, Marquises, and Earls, when not enjoying a distinct title, to have the designation *Lord* or *Lady* prefixed to the Christian name. All other branches of the nobility to have the word *Hon.* prefixed. The words *Right Hon.*, in the same situation, to distinguish Privy Councillors. Knights to be indicated merely by the appellation *Sir* prefixed to their first name. Titles of inferior rank, whether ecclesiastical, military, or civil, to be given only when necessary to make a distinction between authors having the same surname and Christian name.”

An unlearned Englishman will perhaps be surprised to find, that if he wants a work of *Voltaire* (by which name he took the liberty of describing himself in the title-pages of his own books), and seeks it under *Voltaire*, he will be referred back to the *first* volume of this Catalogue, where they occur under “Arouet;” thus, “Arouet de Voltaire (François Marie).”

every book entered in strict alphabetical order under the name of the author as it occurs in the title-page, or under its proper subject when anonymous, the arrangement would have been intelligible in itself, and have saved all the elaborate trifling, bibliographical pedantry, loss of time, and heavy expense, which characterize the present scheme.

It is impossible, in the limited space we can afford, to point out all the objections to the plan which has been adopted; but its defects seem to be sufficiently manifested by the necessity of stopping the progress of the printing* of the Catalogue, by the naïve confession of the Keeper of the Printed Books that it cannot be completed in manuscript for eight more years; and that even then it will be in arrear for sixteen years! The effect of the arrears may be seen by merely opening the copy of the *first* volume of the *new* Catalogue in the Reading-room, which is interleaved, and actually forms *seventeen folio volumes*, and which, from the number

* Upon this subject the following statement occurs in the Parliamentary Return:—"The Keeper of the Printed Books has represented to the Trustees, that no part of a work of the nature of the Catalogue, *alphabetically arranged*, ought to be printed till the whole of the manuscript from the first to the last article is ready for the press: that is to say, not only each article written out, but also carefully arranged in the strict order and precise form in which it is to be printed. He states that this is required to insure *correctness* as well as *completeness*; that the books catalogued under the last letters of the alphabet require cross-references from among the entries in the early letters, which cross-references cannot be inserted if such early letters be already printed; and that on revising the old titles, entries perpetually occur in the latter letters of the old Catalogue, which entries have to be inserted among the earlier parts of the alphabet, from which they would be omitted if these parts were previously printed. Upon these representations, the Trustees have consented for the present to suspend the printing of the Catalogue."

of manuscript additions, and the inconvenience they occasion, is scarcely distinguishable from the interleaved copy of the old Catalogue.

If common sense do not induce the Trustees to put an end to a scheme that involves a heavy waste alike of time and of the Public money, and retards the completion of the Catalogue, it may be hoped that the subject will attract the attention of some of the very few Members of the House of Commons who really care for literature. We say advisedly, that there is no difficulty in forming and printing a complete alphabetical Catalogue of the Library of the British Museum, which would answer every *practical* purpose; provided that the plan of the present volume, its ninety-one rules, its eternal cross-references, its "another copy," "another copy," and all similar frivolities, be discontinued. It would be far better to print the Catalogue which is now in use in the Reading-room, slightly revised, and completed up to the present time, and to make a *classed* Catalogue hereafter, than to keep the Public without a new Catalogue until it may please Mr. Panizzi to permit the Trustees to print one. The idea of its requiring, as he says, *eight* more years to form the Catalogue, *in manuscript only*, is, we repeat, an insult to the common sense of the country.*

In order that all the impediments to using the Library may be understood, it is necessary to bear

* From the "Spectator" of the 23rd May, 1846.

in mind that there is only *one* copy of the interleaved Catalogue, consisting of *forty-eight* large and ponderous folio volumes; and to explain its position. In one corner of one of the Reading-rooms, a large desk is placed, on which are these forty-eight volumes; and behind one part of it, stand the *five* volumes of the Catalogue of the Royal Library, and the *seventeen* volumes interleaved, of the *first* volume of the *new* Catalogue. The desk is so near to the wall on one side, and to a table on the other, that there is barely room for a person to pass behind those who may be using the Catalogue. The number of Readers daily is about 230; and as no book can be obtained until the whole of its title, size, place, and date of publication, and press-mark have been copied out of the Catalogue, some idea may be formed of the difficulty and inconvenience to which they are subjected. From the uncertainty as to what word a book may be entered under, possibly two or more of these volumes must be examined; so that the pressure round this desk, of persons consulting the Catalogue and copying out the titles, &c., is sometimes so great that it may be almost compared to the entrance to a bee-hive on a summer's day.

The question, then, arises, whether it is absolutely necessary that this Catalogue should be referred to for every book which a reader may require—supposing it to be the rarest in the Library, or one as well known as Hume's History of England? After a long acquaintance with the working of the former as well as of the present system, we consider that in an immense majority of cases there is no necessity

to oblige readers to refer to the Catalogue,—the simple title of the book they require being sufficient. We know that the inconvenience attending this obligation is felt by many literary men, whose time is of value to them, to be so great that they are often deterred by it from going to the British Museum for books, unless they are absolutely obliged; preferring to apply to the London Institution, or to any other large library, or even to give up the reference altogether. The system introduced by the present Keeper of the Printed Books is, to require every person who wants any work, to fill up the annexed form :

Press Mark.	Title of the Work, or Number of the MS. wanted.	Size.	Place.	Date.

(Date.)

(Signature.)

The readers are particularly requested, “1. Not to ask for more than *one work* on the same ticket; 2. To transcribe *literally* from the Catalogues the title of the work wanted; 3. To write in a plain clear hand, in order to avoid delay and mistakes.”* Thus, after taking the trouble to find the book in the Catalogue, the reader is expected to make a *literal* copy of its title; he has then to ascertain and insert the size, the place where it was printed,

* It is to be lamented, when so much was printed on those tickets, that the Readers were not informed how long a time they were expected to wait for their books—half an hour, an hour, an hour and a half, or two hours? If such delays are to continue, a waiting-room should be attached to the Library, with refreshments.

and the time of its publication ; and to add to all this the "press-mark," *i. e.* certain figures and letters, which are added to the Catalogue, indicating the local position of the book in the Library, being *five* entries, besides his signature and the date. The slightest error in any one of these entries will be made an excuse for not sending him the book ; and, after waiting perhaps an hour and a half, he may, if he inquires, find that all his trouble and time have been entirely thrown away.

The alteration in the old system was an experiment to expedite the delivery of the books ; and it was for a little while so successful as to be approved of by some, though strongly objected to by others. For a long time past, however, the delay in obtaining books has exceeded what it was at any former period ; but the additional trouble thrown upon the readers, to obviate delay, still continues. To compel a Reader to fill up the present tickets is, in fact, to impose upon him a duty which belongs to the paid servants of the Public ; for the trouble is transferred from the librarians to the Readers. But the trouble thus given to the Readers is very much greater than would be required of the attendants in the Library ; because from habit, and constant reference to the Catalogue, &c., the librarians ought to be able to ascertain where any book may be found, in a tenth part of the time which it takes a Reader to find its place in the Catalogue, and to copy its title, date, &c.

To prevent our observations respecting "press-

marks" from being misapprehended, we will state distinctly that our objection is not to their being added to the Catalogue, so that a particular book may be specified if a Reader think it necessary, but to its being made a *sine quâ non* to the production of any book whatever, that the ticket shall contain the "press-mark," as well as the title, date, &c.; thereby compelling readers to refer, in *every* instance, to the present inconvenient Catalogue. In fifty out of fifty-five instances, the mere title of any book, taken from memory or from a memorandum, ought to be sufficient. If a particular edition is wanted, the applicant will not fail to specify it. If he has any doubt on either point, he will refer to the Catalogue: but at present, even if the title and the press-mark be correctly given, and there happen to be an error as to the size or date, the book will neither be produced, nor will the application receive the slightest attention, even though there be only one edition of that book, and no other with a similar title in the English language. Let the applicant complain to Mr. Panizzi, and he will find that the neglect is justified, and he is politely informed that it is his own fault.*

It may be said in defence both of the tickets and of the delays, that the number of Readers has much increased; but this is more than met by the increased facility which the concentration of the books in the new Library affords, and by an in-

* It will be seen in page 86 that the Trustees entirely approve of Mr. Panizzi's answer.

creased number of attendants. If, however, there be not enough attendants, let the Trustees be told so, and more would be provided. We repeat, that in 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.

Another of Mr. Panizzi's schemes not only prevents the books from being speedily delivered, but it is objectionable on other grounds. Formerly, the tickets on which the Readers wrote the titles of the books they wanted were retained as evidence, under their own hands, that they had applied for those books. Upon these tickets the librarians placed the Press-mark, and the book was speedily delivered. This was a simple process, and saved the trouble and delay of registering the tickets at the moment. Now, however, all the tickets are immediately entered in a register; and, by Rule 4, the Reader, "before leaving the room," is "to return the books to an attendant, and *to obtain the corresponding ticket*, the Reader being responsible for the books so long as the ticket remains uncanceled." Hence, if a book had been lost or injured, and it afterwards became necessary to trace into whose hands it had passed, the tickets, signed by every person who had asked for it, could at any time be brought forward, and it was strong evidence that it had been in their possession on a particular day: but as the ticket cannot now be produced after the party has quitted the Library, he may deny that he had ever applied for or seen it, and say there is an error in the registration. This

part of Mr. Panizzi's plan, therefore, lessens rather than increases the safety of books.

Another reason for requiring each Reader to copy the title from the Catalogue may be said to be this—that as every book in the world is not in the Library of the British Museum, if a Reader wrote for one which happened not to be there, the librarian's time would be wasted in searching for it. This looks specious; but the very inquiry is so beneficial to the Library and to the Public that even if there were no other reason for not obliging a Reader to refer to the Catalogue, this would be sufficient. The discovery that any book is not in the Library, and that it has been asked for, is of great consequence: for by merely placing together all the tickets for books which were not forthcoming, the deficiencies would from time to time be brought to the notice of the Librarian, and perhaps of the Trustees.

We contend, therefore, that as Mr. Panizzi's plan has failed in its object, the Trustees of the British Museum should oblige him to revert to the old system, which was infinitely more simple, more convenient to the Public, and more likely to preserve the books from injury. It seems very hard, after a man has given a guinea for the first volume of the new Catalogue, to find that it is of little use to him; because, even if he comply with every other part of the conditions, by copying literally the title, size, place of publication, and date, still he must refer to the Catalogue in the Library to look for the press-mark. In the letter to the

Treasury from the Secretary to the Trustees, it is said that Mr. Panizzi "is eminently qualified for the trust reposed in him; that he devotes the whole of his time and thoughts to make the Library complete, and at the same time accessible to the Public on the easiest terms." His qualifications for the trust we will no otherwise dispute than as it relates to the compilation of a Catalogue; for which task, judging from the specimen before us, he appears to be wholly unfit. Nor are we disposed to question his good intentions; but, under his administration, obstructions have been imposed in obtaining access to the Library without any corresponding advantage. He may not be blameable for trying a new plan, but he is undoubtedly blameable for obstinately persisting in it after it has failed.

Adam Smith says, there is nothing which one Government sooner learns from another than the art of extracting money out of the people's pockets: certainly there is nothing which one librarian sooner learns from another than the art of shifting trouble from himself to the Public; for though every manuscript has a specific short name,—as "Caligula, A iv.," "Claudius, C vii.," or a simple number,—Mr. Panizzi's system of press-marks, and of returning the tickets to the applicants, has of late been imitated in the Manuscript department: thus, if a person want the "Harleian MS. 4028," he must find this entry in the Catalogue, that the individual in the room which contains the Manuscripts may learn, what it is *his* business to find out—namely, on what

shelf the volume stands. Whether the press-mark be or be not inserted on the tickets for *manuscripts*, the quickness with which they can be obtained forms a remarkable contrast to the delay in the Printed Book department.

Did any one of the Trustees ever consult books in the General Reading-room? are any of them aware of the existence and practical effect of the system? have they ever thought of the other improvements which the Reading-room requires,* tending alike to the security of the Library, the promotion of literary investigations, and the comfort of the Readers? At present we shall only advert to two of the most obvious requirements—better ventilation, the room being often absolutely noxious; and, in consequence of the crowded state of the rooms, a separation of the comparatively few Readers who consult the Library for the highest purpose for which it was instituted—the production of historical and other works requiring great and original research—from those, naturally an immense majority, who go there only to read the light publications of the day, and from those who seem to have no other habitation. Twelve or fourteen tables in the King's Library, (where there is room enough for a hundred Readers,) and one attendant, would be all that is wanted.

* Though the Reading-room is susceptible of many improvements, it has one great merit in the civility of the attendants, from the humblest up to the courteous gentleman, Mr. Cates, who has so long presided over it, and whose urbanity and intelligence are so useful to every one who applies to him for information. Mr. Grabham, who succeeds Mr. Cates in the latter part of the day, is entitled to similar praise.

Our limits of space compel us to bestow a much shorter notice on the defects in the Library, to which Mr. Panizzi has very properly called the attention of the Trustees; and for supplying which, and binding, the Treasury intend to devote 10,000*l* annually. We heartily rejoice at such liberality, but we must take leave to say a few words on the application of the money.

We cannot forget that we are Englishmen; that the British Museum contains the only great Library in England which is accessible to the country; and that it consequently is a *National* library. It is therefore not unreasonable to hope that at least two-thirds of the large annual grant proposed, will be spent on books printed in or relating to Great Britain and Ireland; so as to render the Library, at the earliest possible period, complete in *English* works. At present the deficiencies in English literature are so great, that the cheapest as well as the rarest books are often wanting; and Mr. Panizzi has pointed out some remarkable instances. But with regard to the books in English literature to which he alludes,—such as a complete copy of the Book of Common Prayer, two volumes of the Nautical Almanack, Spelman's *Reliquiæ*, the first edition of Camden's *Britannia*, and its first English Translation by Holland, some editions of Drayton's Works, early editions of the *Paradise Lost*, &c."—why were they not purchased long since out of the money voted for the Library, in preference to any foreign bibliographical curiosity, seeing that the cost of all these books would probably be under

50*l.*? Many of the deficiencies in English books not mentioned by Mr. Panizzi, (which the system of his predecessors would, as we have already said, have brought to the notice of the Trustees,) may often be supplied for a few shillings; and yet the Library still remains without them. While, however, so strong an exhibition is made of defects as to induce the iron-hearted Treasury to open its coffers, and while the imperfection of the Copyright Act is deplored, we would inquire whether the Museum has done all in its own power to enforce the Copyright Act, by applications at proper times and at the right places for the books to which it is entitled? still more, has due care been taken to obtain valuable books and papers which might have been obtained for *nothing*? We doubt the first, and are sure respecting the last point. In the various papers printed by the Government, or for the Houses of Parliament, the Museum is sadly defective,—such as Private Acts of Parliament, Appeal Cases, Peerage Cases, &c. To similar neglect may be attributed the discreditable fact mentioned by Mr. Panizzi, that the Museum does not possess “the Laws, Ordinances, or Government Acts, of one-half of the Dependencies of England.” An application to the Colonial Office, many years ago, would certainly have obtained all these papers.

We believe that Mr. Panizzi is desirous of rendering the Library complete, and that he is on the right track; but we are sure that he has made, and we fear that he will continue to make, great mistakes, if he be suffered to retain the despotic power

which he now possesses, and which it is said he does not exercise in the gentlest manner. His situation is so peculiar as to require great delicacy in his conduct towards the literary men of this country: it is undoubtedly his duty to do everything in his power to assist their researches, and to remove all grounds for complaint, in the department at the head of which he is placed, instead of justifying neglect in his assistants.

Before concluding, it is desirable to say a few words on the *Catalogues of the Manuscripts*, a subject of even greater importance than a Catalogue of the printed books; for printed books may be found in other libraries, whereas the information contained in manuscripts often exists in such manuscripts only. This department has been comparatively neglected by the Trustees; and while as much aid has been given to the Keeper of the Printed Books as he considers necessary for the completion of his impracticable Catalogue, the Public have justly complained that there is no *General Index* to the voluminous Catalogues of *Additional Manuscripts*, much less have those Catalogues been printed. It is however satisfactory to know, that, like most other things in this world, the Index is *in progress*. It appears from the Parliamentary Return, that "the General Index to the Additional Manuscripts has been continued from No. 7,080 to No. 10,019 inclusive, including the Manuscripts acquired in the years 1828-1835; and a detailed Catalogue has been drawn up of the manuscript Music acquired in the years 1843-1845, including the large collec-

tion presented by the Most Honourable the Marquis of Northampton." It is also stated in the Return, that an Index has been made to the late Mr. Rich's collection of Oriental Manuscripts, that many volumes of Manuscripts have been described and indexed, and that many other volumes have been arranged and numbered. Parliament might, however, have been informed, *when* this General Index would find its way into the Reading-room, and *when* improved Catalogues of all the Manuscripts would be completed. We believe it will be found that no fault rests with the head of that department; who, having only four assistants, seems to have done as much as might fairly have been expected of him. All the Catalogues of the Manuscripts—(perhaps except the Lansdowne)—the Harleian, the Cottonian, the Additional Manuscripts, &c.—are notoriously imperfect; and what benefit has the Public yet derived from the progress made to remedy the defects? Absolutely none for many years: so that while one department, and that of the highest value, has been comparatively starved because it is not a hobby, no expense has been thought too great in another, for the indulgence of as many caprices and follies in the compilation of a new Catalogue, as ever rendered learning ridiculous or labour useless.

The statements which we have made respecting the Library of the British Museum are true, or they are not true: if they are not true, let their error be shown by proving that good Catalogues of the Manuscripts exist, and that the Indexes to the

Manuscript Catalogues are ready for use; that the regulations of the Reading-room are expedient; that the plan of the Catalogue of the Printed Books is judicious and practical; that the Catalogue will be ready before 1854, and that when ready it will not be sixteen years in arrear! But if the facts to which we have called public attention are true, then we ask, whether it is not expedient that some change should be forthwith made in the system by which the Museum is governed?*

On the 18th of May, two days after the first part of the preceding observations were published, I wanted to refer to five volumes in the Library at the Museum; and as one of them was not brought to me after the lapse of an hour and a half, I thought it right to complain of the neglect to Mr. Antonio Panizzi, the Keeper of the Printed Books. It is proper to observe that the delay in obtaining books has, for a long time past, (so far as my knowledge extends) been generally complained of; and such was the effect of the system on myself, that I never consulted the Library if I could possibly procure the works elsewhere. Nor was I singular in this resolution.

Circumstances had, however, long since convinced me of the uselessness of applying to Mr. Panizzi, or of complaining of Mr. Panizzi's Department to the Trustees; but as the case in question was one of more than ordinary neglect, and as I had determined

* From the "Spectator" of the 30th May, 1846.

to bring the subject before the Public, I thought it advisable to submit it for Mr. Panizzi's consideration. If, however, I did not expect a satisfactory result, I certainly did not calculate upon being assailed with personal abuse in a pamphlet by a salaried Officer of a Public Institution, because I had presumed to complain of inattention in his department.

One of the five books for which I applied, and which has caused the present discussion, was "Burchett's Complete History of the most remarkable Transactions at Sea, from the earliest accounts of time to the conclusion of the War with France, a folio volume, printed in London in 1720, and well-known to every bookseller, and to most literary men, as "Burchett's History of Transactions at Sea." Having found the title of that work in the Catalogue, I looked carefully for *that only* which, under Mr. Panizzi's rules, I considered necessary, besides its popular title — viz., the *Press-Mark*, supposing that as the *Press-Mark* is said to *identify every volume*, it would of itself be sufficient to procure it, even without the title. To "size," "place," and "date," I paid little attention; and thinking them immaterial, I not unfrequently omitted to write them on the tickets. In this instance I may have been misled on those points by the entry immediately above it in the Catalogue; and the difficulty of avoiding so trifling an error in the present state of the Catalogues in the Library is painfully known to all who are compelled to use them. The ticket was thus filled up:—

Press Mark.	Title of the Work wanted.	Size.	Place.	Date.
581 i	<i>Burchett's History of Transactions at Sea.</i>	8.	*	1707

(Date) *May 18th, 46.* *N. Harris Nicolas.* (Signature.)

After having waited one hour and a half without receiving this book, I quitted the Library, and addressed the following letter to Mr. Panizzi:—

TO A. PANIZZI, ESQ.

Torrington Square, 18th May 1846.

MY DEAR SIR,

I beg leave to acquaint you with what occurred to me to-day in the Reading-room of the British Museum, thinking it a proper subject of complaint.

At a few minutes after three o'clock, I wrote, according to the present forms, for *five* books. After half an hour four of them were brought me. The fifth, viz. "Burchett's complete History of Transactions at Sea," not having appeared, I spoke twice to Mr. Scott, who assured me that he had often applied for it, and that on his last application he was told that I had given a wrong Press-mark, which he had corrected. I denied that I had given a wrong Press-mark. At *half past four* I again asked for the book; and a strong observation having caused the gentleman who succeeded Mr. Cates to attend to the matter, he ascertained that I had given both the Title and the Press-mark *correctly*. A person then came to me from the Library. His first

* Three letters were written here, which, though rather illegible, look more like *fol* than anything else; but Mr. Panizzi reads it *fer*, and says it may have been meant for *London*!

excuse was, that though the Press-mark and the Title were correctly given, I had erroneously quoted the date ! This was true ; but I submit that when a Press-mark, and a Title are correctly stated, the book ought to be forthcoming ; or, at all events, that some explanation should be afforded *before an hour and a half*. I told him so ; and his excuse then was, that *he* had only had my ticket *half an hour*, and that he had sent me *four* books ! How far this may be a justification it is for you to judge ; and I leave the facts without comment for your consideration.

I remain, &c.

I ought to add, that the person's manner was *not* disrespectful.*

Mr. Panizzi's reply reached me the next day :—

TO SIR N. HARRIS NICOLAS.

British Museum, May 19th, 1846.

MY DEAR SIR,

I hasten to answer your letter of yesterday's date, which I have this moment received.

With reference to the delay of which you complain in the delivery of four out of five of the works you asked, it is now impossible for me to find on whom the fault rests. Had you informed me of the delay at the moment, I might have been more successful. The attendant who sent those four works to the Reading-room, has not been here long, and may therefore have been less prompt in finding them than a more experienced hand might have been ; and I regret it.

As to the fifth book, it appears from your letter that you required a folio, printed at London in 1720 ; you have, however, given on the ticket the size as *octavo* ; the place as " fvr," which may be is meant for London, and the date 1704. There is in the Catalogue a work of Bur-

* As I did not retain a copy of this letter, it is here reprinted from Mr. Panizzi's pamphlet, p. 18.

chett, different from the one you wanted, and immediately preceding it, "8° Lond. 1704;" you mistook this part of the entry of what you did *not* want, and applied it to what you did.

Should you not deem this answer satisfactory, I will thank you by your informing me of it, that I may lay your complaint before the Trustees. Believe me,

My dear Sir,

Very faithfully yours,

A. PANIZZI.

Most assuredly I did "not deem this answer satisfactory," and I complied with Mr. Panizzi's request by telling him so;—

TO A. PANIZZI, ESQ.

Torrington Square, 19 May, 1846.

MY DEAR SIR,

In reply to your letter I beg leave to say, that your explanation is wholly unsatisfactory to me.

I did not make any complaint respecting the *four* books, because I am so accustomed to such a *delay*, that I consider it a matter of course, though certainly not one of necessity. With respect to the *fifth* book, I am of opinion that the *Title only* ought to be, as it would have been in the time of your predecessors, sufficient. I did, however, give, and correctly, the Press-mark, and there is no other book in the English language with that title. It is idle to pretend that, because a mistake was made as to its size and date, which, in the instance of a work of which there is only one edition, cannot be necessary, and ought not to be required, there was any difficulty in finding the volume.

If there had really been any doubt as to the work I required, why was not the question asked me, or *both* books brought? whereas no notice whatever was taken of my application for an hour and a half, and then only because I insisted upon its being attended to.

You seem to think that I should have informed you of

the delay in bringing the four books : I rejoice that I did not waste my time in such a manner ; for now, when I do complain of a flagrant act of neglect, you justify it by imputing it to myself, in not having given correctly, that which ought not to be required.

My next complaint shall be to the Trustees themselves. I pray of you to use your own discretion about submitting this correspondence to the Trustees. It is the less material to me whether you do, or do not do so, inasmuch as I am perfectly sure that their attention must very shortly be called by the Public, or by the Government, to the difficulties and delay arising from the present Regulations, and the state of the Catalogues in obtaining printed books. Believe me,

My dear Sir,

Yours very faithfully,

N. HARRIS NICOLAS.

Because I had mentioned the words "Regulations" and "Catalogue" in this letter, Mr. Panizzi says I "shifted my ground," and he adds—"If the difficulties and delay arise from the Regulations, then his complaint of neglect against the Attendant was a most ungenerous proceeding ; and if he thought this complaint well grounded, he would not complain of the system."*

The answer to this ridiculous quibble is, as must be apparent from my letters, that I had made no specific "complaint of neglect against the *Attendant* ;" but I complained of an act of neglect in Mr. Panizzi's department, the cause of which it was for him to ascertain. I thought it possible then, and I am sure now, that the fault was much more Mr. Panizzi's, than of any of his Attendants : and I

am not accustomed to attribute blame to subordinates which belongs to their principal. The allusion in the last paragraph of my letter was to the articles in the "Spectator," of which I had, as Mr. Panizzi well knew from first to last, admitted myself to be the author, and which I always intended to send to him when completed, with that avowal; so much for his sneer about "anonymous attacks in the newspapers."* As if it were unfair to call the attention of the Public to what concerns them, or disgraceful to do so in a *newspaper*!

I received in reply the annexed letter, and with it the correspondence *ought* to, and probably would have ended, but for the insidious motive which will afterwards appear;—

TO SIR N. HARRIS NICOLAS.

British Museum, May 20th, 1846.

MY DEAR SIR,

Your letter of the 19th, as well as my answer and your reply of yesterday, shall be laid before the Trustees.

No one will rejoice more than myself at a thorough investigation of any part of my conduct, brought on by avowed and specific complaints in an open and straightforward manner. Believe me,

Very faithfully yours,

A. PANIZZI.

Upon these letters it is necessary to make some observations.

Mr. Panizzi says that I asked for Burchett's work and the four others "at once."† I did so; and for this reason—that as he had made it incum-

* Pages 9, 17.

† Page 9.

bent upon the Readers to copy the title "literally" of every book from the Catalogue, they usually complete that tedious process at one time, to avoid going backwards and forwards to the desk on which it stands; and as it is a matter of uncertainty when the books may be brought, they give all the tickets to the Attendant before they commence their labours; at least, such is my practice. They do not, however, expect (as Mr. Panizzi tries to make it believed), that *all* the books which are written for will be immediately brought to them; but they ought to receive one book in a few minutes, and the others at short intervals afterwards.

In the instance in question, four of these books were brought to me before half an hour had fully elapsed; and this fact Mr. Panizzi considers the most conclusive "proof of the *dispatch* in obtaining books," and of the "unreasonableness of such Readers"* as myself. He then goes on to say—

"I assert without fear of contradiction, that, in none of the great public Libraries in the world, equal in extent to that of the British Museum, is one single reader supplied with four out of five works, which he asks for at once, at the rate of seven minutes and a half each work, nor even in double that time. The very fact that Sir N. Harris Nicolas considers such a delay a matter, 'not of necessity,' proves to what he is reduced for want of solid ground of complaint."†

* Pages 9, 10.

† Page 10.

This specious statement is perfectly characteristic of its author; for the inference is that the four books were brought to me *seriatim*, viz., one of them in seven minutes and a half, and the three others at regular intervals of about the same duration, and that I was not kept waiting for the first book more than eight minutes. But what was the fact? *I did not receive any one of them* until the expiration of *half an hour*, when they were brought about the same time.

When Mr. Panizzi asserted, or rather, *more suo*, insinuated that I had received one or more of the books within eight minutes of the time they were asked for, *he knew that such was not the case*. In my first letter to him, written immediately after I left the Museum, and when all the circumstances were fresh in my recollection, I said, "After half an hour, four of them were brought to me." That he understood me to mean that I had waited half an hour before I obtained any book, and that he himself had in the meantime ascertained that such was the fact, is proved by the following passage in his reply:

"With reference to the delay of which you complain in the delivery of four out of five of the works you asked, it is now impossible for me to find on whom the fault rests. Had you informed me of the delay at the moment, I might have been more successful. The attendant who sent those four works to the Reading-room has not been here long, and may, therefore, have been less prompt in finding them than a more experienced hand might have been, and I regret it."

His subsequent assertion, that he did this for

"peace sake," inasmuch as he imagined I was seeking a quarrel with him (or, as he calls it, a *querelle d'Allemand*), and not because there was any occasion for regret,* is so clearly an after-thought, and is so manifestly untrue, that I shall not waste a word in commenting upon the equivocation.

I come now to the specific point under discussion. Ought, or ought not, a book to be brought to a Reader when the *only two material references* are written on the ticket, viz., the *Press-mark* and the *Title*; the one with literal, and the other with sufficient accuracy, even if the columns for "size," "place," and "date" are filled up illegibly, or erroneously, or both, or not filled up at all?

In ordinary cases, such, for example, as applying for any work to a bookseller, the party mentions the title by which it is usually known. He does not say, "Send me Edward Earl of Clarendon's History of the Rebellion and Civil Wars of England; to which is added an Historical View of the Affairs of Ireland," or "David Hume's History of England, from the Invasion of Julius Cæsar to the Revolution in 1688;" but merely "Clarendon's History of the Rebellion," or "Hume's History of England;" or, more likely still, "Clarendon's Rebellion," "Hume's England." If he does not specify which edition he requires, the bookseller will send him the best, or the one he may happen to have. With respect to the book in question, few persons would say to a bookseller, "Send me Josiah Burchett's complete History of the most Re-

* Page 10.

markable Transactions at Sea, from the earliest Accounts of Time to the conclusion of the War with France;" but "send me Burchett's History of Transactions at Sea."

Mr. Panizzi, however, not only requires the title of every book at length, but the "readers are *particularly* requested to transcribe *literally* from the Catalogues the title of the work wanted." If this were complied with, half a sheet of paper, instead of the limited space of little more than two inches by one and a half, now allowed for the purpose; and a quarter of an hour would sometimes be necessary. Admitting that an applicant, in asking a bookseller, who knows his business, for a common book, of which there is only one edition, erroneously calls it an octavo when it was a folio, would he not be immediately told that he was mistaken as to the size? but "*there, Sir, is the book.*" If a bookseller would readily find a book, imperfectly or erroneously described as to its size and date, what excuse can there be for its not being as promptly produced by a paid and organized corps of librarians?

Unnecessary delay in the supply of books having existed previously to August 1837, when Mr. Panizzi was placed at the head of that Department, a remedy was required. He says, in the first page of his pamphlet, "that the books are found by *certain references, press-marks, or symbols, by which each work is identified with the corresponding entry of its title in the Catalogue;*" and he imposed upon the Readers not only the absolute neces-

sity of finding this symbol in the Catalogue, and of writing it on the ticket, but he went the length of insisting upon their copying, besides the title "*literally*," the size of the book, where published, and when published. This was burthensome and inconvenient; but it was then supposed to be a choice of evils, whether so much trouble should be incurred, or the old delay be continued. The immediate effect of the new system was a quick supply of books; and it is very desirable to be able to identify any particular book by the Press-mark, *if a student wishes to do so.*

At that moment, however, some readers objected to the innovation; and strong remarks were then, as now, very generally made upon the impropriety of appointing a Foreigner to a situation which required a profound knowledge of our National literature, and which ought to be the reward (few enough, God knows, in England!) of literary merit.

It pleased, however, the authorities to consider that an Italian notary,—whose opinions had been found much too liberal for the latitude of Modena, whence *abiit nemine salutato*, and who was undistinguished even in the literature of his own Country,—was fitter to be placed at the head of the literary department of the National Library of Great Britain than any native-born Subject.*

For myself, however, though I did not admire the

* It is only just to Mr. Panizzi to observe that he has done all in his power to become an Englishman, by having been naturalized by Act of Parliament;— "*Calum non animum mutant.*"

selection of a Foreigner for a place which ought undoubtedly to be filled by an Englishman, I cared less about it than most other persons. All I desired was an efficient Officer, who, by doing his duty with zeal, courtesy and intelligence, would enable the Public to consult the Library with comfort. For some time, whether from Mr. Panizzi's system of Press-marks, or as I believe (and shall explain why hereafter) from his attending vigilantly to his duty, the improvement was manifest. He was then attacked, and if I remember rightly, on more than one occasion; nor was his peculiar position forgotten. To aid, as far as might be in my humble power, a person so peculiarly placed, who I then thought was fitted for his Office, and from whose administration I looked for the two great *desiderata* of a Public Library—*facility of access, and a good practical Catalogue at the earliest possible moment*, I wrote to him the following letter:

TO A. PANIZZI, ESQ.*

Torrington Square, 20th October, 1837.

MY DEAR SIR,

Having heard to day, with great surprise, that a reader of the Library of the British Museum had expressed dissatisfaction at the new regulations which you have introduced for obtaining books, I take the liberty of offering you the opinion of a person who has constantly used the Library for sixteen years, and who, perhaps, is not very likely to be suspected of bestowing indiscriminate or venal praise.

The great object of a public Library is dispatch in pro-

* This letter is printed from the copy sent to me by Mr. Panizzi, which agrees with the copy in his pamphlet.

curing books. This can only be secured by *perspicuity* in describing them.

In my humble judgment, no better mode could possibly be devised for immediately obtaining any particular work, than the printed tickets you have suggested. By specifying the titles from the Catalogue, and copying from it the *press-marks*, the applicant can, at once, identify the particular edition, or copy of an edition which he requires. The importance of this to a critical student is obvious; and I cannot show the utility of the *new* system more forcibly than by saying that I have often, formerly, been assured that a book was not in the Museum, though I had myself referred to it only a few days before.* The requisition to insert the Titles and Press-marks on the Tickets is not merely reasonable, but it is indispensable, if the Library is to be conducted with satisfaction to the Public and to the Librarians. If people will not take the trouble to comply with rules, which, so far from being vexatious, are absolutely necessary for their own comfort, they can have no right to complain. The fault is *theirs* if mistakes or delay ensue; and it is as absurd as unjust to impute the effect of their own ignorance or carelessness to the officers of the Museum.

The only thing I can suggest about the new Tickets is, that the *Press-marks* should be made more *simple*;† but this is so manifest, and is so entirely dependent upon the re-arrangement of the Library; that it would be ridiculous to say another word on the subject.

As to *dispatch* in procuring books—Not only does my own experience convince me of the great improvements which have taken place since your last appointment, but such is the opinion of every one whom I have heard speak of the Museum; and I have long had daily opportunities of witnessing your courtesy and earnest desire to render

* Vide page 74, *post*, where it is shown that this is sometimes still the case.

† No improvement has yet been made on this subject; and the following specimens will show how complicated the Press-marks are, and how likely it is that they should lead to mistakes in transcription — “1185^g/₄₄,” “1179^d/₁₅,” “1145 k 4, 5,” &c.

your department as beneficial as possible to the Public. To point out a defect, or to suggest an improvement, is to secure your attention ; and as a matter of common justice, I anxiously bear testimony to the change which has taken place since your promotion. You have done wonders in a few weeks ; and I pray you not to allow the caprice or folly of individuals to affect your exertions. Believe me,

With great esteem,

My dear Sir,

Very sincerely yours,

N. HARRIS NICOLAS.

I neither regret, nor wish to recall, or to change one word of this letter. It was unasked—perhaps unexpected ; and as it arose from no unworthy motive, I hope it proved gratifying, if not useful to Mr. Panizzi. I have not preserved his reply, as I rarely keep private letters, and never make notes of conversations—useful, but not very English habits. Some facts, however, are apparent from this letter, which ought not to be disregarded. My approval of the insertion of Press-marks on the Tickets, was expressly founded upon their enabling an applicant *at once to identify the particular edition, or copy of an edition which he requires*, and upon their accelerating the delivery of books. I also commended some other improvements he had made, and I entreated him not to relax in his useful efforts. *This letter was written a few weeks after the changes took place*, and it is obvious that I had no personal dislike to Mr. Panizzi. From that time we have been, uninterruptedly, on friendly terms ; and there was not anything in my remarks on the Library, nor in my letters to him, at which he should have taken of-

fence, or which justify the personal rudeness of his pamphlet.

This letter, though altogether forgotten by me, has, it seems, been cherished by Mr. Panizzi; and from the same motive that a New Zealander preserves the musket which has been given to him—to be fired off at the first convenient opportunity against the donor.

Admitting for a moment the necessity of requiring the Press-mark, as well as the Title on the tickets, the next questions are, does the Press-mark always identify the volume? and, if the Press-mark be accurately, and the title sufficiently correctly given, will this ensure the delivery of the volume? It is not pretended in this instance that the Press-mark was wrong, though the title was not given "*literally.*" It is essential to remember that Mr. Panizzi says* "*by the Press-mark each work is identified with the corresponding entry of its title in the Catalogue.*" If this were true, what ought "581ⁱ" to point to? Of course, to a *particular work*: such being its sole object, the Librarian's own explanations of its import, and the only ground on which I ever approved of its introduction.

Will it then be believed that in the face of Mr. Panizzi's own declarations, it *had no such effect*? It indicates *not the book itself*, but *merely a long shelf* containing *folios* in a certain press! Let this most luminous of Librarians, however, give his own explanation; for assuredly it would not be credited on any lesser authority:—

* Page 3.

“After having sent into the Reading-room *four* out of the five books asked for by Sir N. H. Nicolas—which, as he states, took half an hour—and therefore, as nearly as possible, at half-past three, the same attendant went in search of the fifth, marked 581 *i*. He found that 581 *i* contained only *folios*, and he did not, therefore, and very properly, lose more of his time in looking for an octavo, which was written for; he had lost enough by being sent to a place where what was wanted could not be.”*

So then, with all the boasted precision of his system, it depends neither upon the Title, nor upon those vaunted Press-marks, nor even upon *both*, whether a book can be found—but the Librarian must first be told *its size*!!! Can folly or confusion go beyond this? and yet the Keeper of the Printed Books has held the appointment nearly nine years! If the *size* of a book is so essential, why is it not made the *principal* entry in the ticket, instead of being left for a small column? Why are the Readers deluded into disregarding it, by being told that the Press-mark *identifies each work*, when, as in this case, it points only to a shelf, containing—the Librarians alone know—how many other books?

It is said that by my having written the figure “8” in the column headed “size,” the Attendant was directed to “look for a work where it could not be.” I contend, that the figure “8” ought not to have been taken as any part of the direction, *until* the *two cardinal points*, viz., the *Press-mark* and the

Title had *failed*. He was directed (I thought, to a particular volume, but), to a particular shelf by the *Press-mark*; and by *the Title* to a book on that shelf. Why then were not those simple directions obeyed? If they had been, no difficulty would have arisen; but Mr. Panizzi says the Attendant "*very properly*"* did not look in the place to which he was directed, and where if he had looked he would have found the book. How then can Mr. Panizzi venture to say that the Attendant was "sent to a place where what was wanted could not be?"* His guide was the *Press-mark*, and that told him the *exact* "place where what was wanted" *actually stood*.

The *size* of a book is only one part of its description; and in a Library where it is pretended that every book is identified by the *Press-mark*, and where there is only one edition of such work, it is of very little consequence. But even in a case so clear as this, confusion arose, and it is curious to see how it was sought to be remedied.

Mr. Panizzi's account of what took place is so amusing, and presents so charming a picture of order and regularity, that it may relieve even this dull disquisition:

"The Attendant, however, being newly appointed, and being anxious to serve Sir N. H. Nicolas, set about trying to find what was wanted. The first difficulty which presented itself was to make out the ticket, so badly written as almost to defy the eye of a man unaccustomed to the hand. A consultation

* Page 12.

was held with another Attendant (and thus the loss of time of another man added to the former) and the name *Burchett* being made out, the Catalogue was referred to, and the three entries found as already transcribed. The ticket, let it be remembered, contained only the words 'Burchett's History of Transactions at Sea, 8°. fvr 1704,' without saying for what period. The first of the three entries began with the words 'Memoirs of Transactions at Sea,' and related to an 8vo. printed at London in 1703: *Memoirs* and *History* are not the same words; yet, as a mistake had occurred, might this not be the book, the date, 1703, being so near to 1704? The second entry was, to be sure, of an 8vo. printed at London, in 1704; but then it was not a History of Transactions at Sea; the third entry, besides being a History not of Transactions at Sea, like the *Memoirs*, but only of the most remarkable ones, was a folio, not an 8vo. and printed in 1720, not 1704: It stood, however, in 581 *i*. In doubt which was the book wanted, the Attendant not unnaturally supposed it might be the first; but then the entry had no Press-mark which could enable him to ascertain the fact by looking at the book itself: this led him to make a third Attendant likewise lose some time to examine into the circumstances; who, knowing more of the Library (having been longer in it), perceived that this entry was unmarked, because the volume to which it referred had been sold as duplicate of one in the Royal Library, where the preserved copy would be found. The first Attendant then transferred the ticket to a

fourth well acquainted with the Royal Collection; and this fourth Attendant, after all proper inquiries, came to the correct conclusion, that the 'Memoirs' were not wanted; but, as he could not say which work was, he returned the ticket to the Attendant from whom he had received it. Now there was yet a chance of making out the meaning of the writer of that ticket, and that was to examine the identical copy of the volume of the Catalogue kept in the Reading-room, from which the ticket ought to have been copied, and to see whether all this trouble was caused by an error in it, which might have misled Sir N. H. Nicolas. To ascertain this the Attendant went to examine that volume, but with no better result, and he was still unable to discover where the error lay.

"Whilst all this was going on, Sir N. H. Nicolas complained once and only once to Scott the Attendant, who did not tell him that he had corrected a wrong Press-mark given for the book, as stated, nor that 'he had often applied for it.' To Mr. Grabham and to Scott Sir N. H. Nicolas pointed out in the Catalogue the book he wanted. Scott went into the library, found the Attendant, assisted by another, still endeavouring to discover the book, and on the entry being pointed out by Scott, as it had been to him by Sir Nicholas, the Attendant went with the Catalogue in his hand to show to this gentleman whence the delay arose, and to express *his great sorrow* that Sir Nicholas should have been kept waiting: He, moreover, told Sir Nicholas that he should now have the book in five minutes. Sir N.

H. Nicolas did not, however, seem satisfied, and allowed the Attendant to have the additional trouble of finding the book in a hurry; yet as soon as he had heard that it would be forthcoming in five minutes, Sir Nicholas *left the room*, without waiting the few minutes requisite to find it, and went away; most fortunately leaving behind him the ticket, which enables me to show the real state of the case. And he complains of having been kept waiting an hour and a half for one book! The fact is, he was kept waiting one hour—for during the first half hour he had got four other books—and who can wonder at it? And who has more right to complain, the Reader of the Officers, or the Officers of the Reader?" *

And yet all this time the book was quietly reposing in the very press, and on the very shelf pointed out by the Press-mark! Was there any other book with that Title in that press, or on that shelf? Was there any other work with that Title in the Museum, or in the English language? If not, why was not the book brought to me, of which I had given the title and indicated the exact position?

Mr. Panizzi says the ticket was "so badly written as almost to defy the eye of a man unaccustomed to the hand."† I appeal even to the *fac-simile* which he has published of it to show that it is sufficiently legible.

The Attendant, Mr. A——, being, it is said, unable to read "Burchett," (it is admitted that the

* Pages 12, 13, 14.

† Page 13.

Press-mark, and the *Title* "History," &c., were legible,) he consults Mr. B., who succeeded in reading "Burchett," and they then refer to the Catalogue, where they found "the three entries" "as already transcribed." These entries Mr. Panizzi prints thus—

- BURCHETT (JOSIAH) *Memoirs of Transactions at Sea during the War with France; beginning in 1668, and ending 1697. 8° Lond. 1703.*
- 806 b ————— Mr. Burchett's Justification on his Naval Memoirs, in answer to Reflections made by Col. Lillingston, or that part which relates to Cape François and Port de Paix. 8° Lond. 1704.
- 2
- 581 i ————— A Complete History of the most remarkable Transactions at Sea, from the earliest Accounts of Time to the conclusion of the War with France. fol. Lond. 1720.

Now if those entries did so occur in the Catalogue, they afford another and a striking proof of the imperfection of Mr. Panizzi's arrangements, because the Catalogue used by the Readers in the Library, *does not correspond* with the Catalogue used by the Librarians themselves; and a more fertile source of mistakes in a large Library cannot well be imagined.

It is next pretended that Messrs. A. and B. were puzzled to discover whether I meant "Burchett's *Memoirs of Transactions at Sea*," or, "Burchett's *History of Transactions at Sea*," because I had

called the latter an octavo, which was the size of the "*Memoirs*." That any man could imagine that I wanted the *Memoirs* in octavo, when I had written for the *History*, which was a folio, and when the Press-mark showed him that the book I required was on the shelf appropriated to folios, seems incredible; but this is not all. It was absolutely impossible that I could have meant the *Memoirs*, not only because I had written expressly for the *History*, and had referred to the *History* by the *Press-mark*, but because the Title of the *Memoirs* is cancelled in the Catalogue in the Reading-room,—a fact which it did not suit Mr. Panizzi to state. It is said, moreover, that in the Catalogue used in the Library, the *Memoirs* have no *Press-mark* whatever;*—so much for Press-marks identifying every work in the Museum!

Mr. Panizzi's special pleading about "1703 and 1704," "octavos and folios," "History" and "Memoirs," therefore avails him nothing; but it concerns the Public much, for it shows the character of the individual on whom literary men are dependent, the petty obstacles by which their researches may be impeded, and the shuffling excuses by which their complaints will be met.

It is the paramount duty of a Librarian to assist the Readers by every means in his power, to interpret their wishes when obscurely expressed, and to give them the benefit of his knowledge of the Library under his charge; but it is Mr. Panizzi's avowed principle to exact from them, when filling up the tickets for books, as much care and atten-

* Page 13.

tion as if they were preparing a legal instrument ; and to punish their errors—errors attributable to the Catalogue which he will not permit to be reprinted, or more likely still, to that part of it which he has reprinted,—with the utmost rigour. His own declaration on this subject to the Committee of the House of Commons leaves no doubt of the cavilling and illiberal spirit by which he is actuated. Speaking of a wrong reference being given on the ticket, he has had the audacity to say, “If it be the fault of the reader, *although I could find the book,* I would on principle return the ticket.”*

Is it to such treatment as this that the Trustees expect English gentlemen to submit? Do they conceive that it is by such obstruction on the part of their Officers that knowledge can be promoted, or the object be attained for which the Institution exists?

Messrs. A. and B. having thus become perplexed, they call Mr. C. to their aid. All that Mr. C. can do, though he knows so much of the library,† is to be able to tell them why the *Memoirs* have no Press-mark, and actually, too, where that book could

* Page 5. The whole passage is as follows :—“By the new system, a person will be obliged to look in the Catalogue in order to put down the reference ; he will therefore ascertain whether we have the book or not, and not give us useless trouble, and to the injury of other readers. Having given that reference, if it be wrong, it may be wrong because it is incorrectly put, and then we must answer for it ; but if it be the fault of the reader, although I could find the book, I would, on principle, return the ticket, because all the other readers are inconvenienced by the carelessness of this one, and the returning the ticket would be the best mode of insuring attention. By this means we shall save much time, and remove much of the inconvenience now complained of by the readers.”

† Page 13

be found ! Messrs. A. B. and C. having performed their parts in this farce, Mr. A. transfers the ticket to Mr. D., who is “well acquainted with the Royal Collection ;*” — a most judicious proceeding, inasmuch as the Press-mark on the ticket informed him that the book was *not* in *that Collection*, and the Title showed that I did not want “Burchett’s *Memoirs*” in the Royal Collection, but “Burchett’s *History* of Transactions at Sea,” in the general Library !

Like any other important functionary, Mr. D. did not, however, arrive at that sagacious conclusion until “after all proper inquiries ;” so the ticket goes back to that unfortunate wight Mr. A. Happily, a brilliant thought now irradiated Mr. A.’s understanding. “There was,” says the Chief of this most intelligent corps of librarians, “yet a chance of making out the meaning of the writer of that ticket, and that was to examine the identical copy of the volume of the Catalogue kept in the Reading-room, from which the ticket ought to have been copied, and to see whether all this trouble was caused by an error in it, which might have misled Sir N. H. Nicolas.”†

Here, of course, the knot was unravelled ?—not a bit of it ! “To ascertain this, the Attendant went to examine that volume, but” alas ! “with no better result, and he was still unable to discover where the error lay !”‡

Thinking I had waited long enough, and being prepared for any similar piece of stupidity in the

* Page 14.

† Page 14.

‡ Page 14.

Library, I went again (I repeat that I applied more than once) to Mr. Scott; and I then referred to Mr. Grabham, with the Catalogue in my hand, and pointed out to him what I wanted. This led to the discovery of the volume; and the Attendant, animated by as contentious and unbecoming a spirit as his Principal, instead of bringing me the book, for which I had waited an hour and a half, the moment he had found it, increased the delay by attempting to prove to me that the mistake was *mine*, and not *his own*! Having at that moment an appointment elsewhere, I could not wait until the book might appear.

A question arises on this subject which is not undeserving of the notice of the Trustees. I do not mean that the exposure made by Mr. Panizzi of the disorder which characterizes his system will obtain their attention, because I am not unreasonable in my expectations. I would merely ask, when so complicated a case occurred, and when Mr. Panizzi's bibliothecal band were running their heads against each other, why was there not an appeal made to their Coryphæus himself? Where was he?—concocting new rules to be added to the *ninety-one* for his impracticable Catalogue,—inventing more excuses for delaying its completion,—imagining how that which is simple can be made perplexing,—or devising under what heads, except the obvious ones, books should be entered?

It is, however, far from certain that his presence would have been beneficial on the occasion; for as he approves of, and defends the ignorance and con-

fusion which was shown by his subordinates, it is fair to conclude that he would not have evinced more intelligence himself. The post of a Librarian is, however, as properly in a Library as a General's on a field of battle; and though the General and his Subalterns may be blunderers alike, the Public, who pay the General and the Librarian, expect to find them where they ought to be. When *six* Attendants cannot discover a book, *though they have both the Press-mark and the Title*,—and when their Chief writes a pamphlet to prove that they “*very properly*” did not, and ought not to be expected to find it,—nay, more, when he attacks with personal abuse the individual who may think that they should have done so, some amendment is assuredly necessary.

Supposing that my correspondence with Mr. Panizzi had closed with his note of the 20th of May, I was rather surprised at the disclosure of his mental uneasiness in the following letter two days afterwards:—

TO SIR N. HARRIS NICOLAS.

British Museum, May 22nd, 1846.

MY DEAR SIR,

The Trustees meet to-morrow, (Saturday, May 23d,) at one o'clock, p. m. Our correspondence shall be submitted to them simply with a request on my part that they be pleased to inquire into all the circumstances to which it refers. I shall consider it a favour if you will bring before them all the charges you have to make against me, and be ready to substantiate them. Believe me,

Yours very faithfully,

A. PANIZZI.

Of this letter Mr. Panizzi says that he therein

“begged of me to prove what I had asserted—the truth of the habitual delay, and its cause;”^{*} but as I had brought no “charges” against Mr. Panizzi, and as I was, as he knew, publishing my opinion on the Library, I did not wish to enter into a profitless correspondence;—and yet Mr. Panizzi, with a singular disregard for truth, says that I “endeavoured to drag him into a controversy about Catalogues and a variety of other points connected with the Library.”[†] I wrote to him as follows:—

TO A. PANIZZI, ESQ.

Torrington Square, 22nd May, 1846.

MY DEAR SIR,

When my letters to you (including if you please the present one) are submitted to the Trustees, they will learn that in my opinion, a great change is necessary in the Regulations of the Reading Room; and I beg leave to assure you that I am perfectly ready to avow and maintain to the Trustees everything which I may have, at any time, or in any place, said or written on the subject, should they think proper to ask me to do so.

It may assuredly be permitted to me as one of the Public, to complain to the Head of any Department of neglect in that Department, and even to consider (as I most certainly do with respect to yours) that many of its proceedings, however well intended, are detrimental to the Public, and require to be altered, without being told that I am “bringing charges” against you, which I am invited to “substantiate,” as if I were accusing you of misconduct.

Believe me,

My dear Sir,

Yours very faithfully,

N. HARRIS NICOLAS.

This Mr. Panizzi presumes to call “declining an

^{*} Page 16.

[†] Page 17.

offer which a man convinced of the veracity of his statements would have willingly accepted," and adds that "I wrote in a much lower tone."* And yet before he ventured to attribute the contents of that letter to so unworthy a cause, he had received all the articles which had appeared in the *Spectator* from me as *their Author*,—a fact which he carefully conceals. This candour on my part forms a striking contrast to a proceeding on his, which I am about to relate, and which has obliged me to advert to his Foreign origin.

My reply to his note of the 22nd of May not suiting his purpose, he wrote the annexed letter on the following day:—

TO SIR N. HARRIS NICOLAS.

British Museum, May 23rd, 1846.

MY DEAR SIR,

Notwithstanding the concluding part of your letter of yesterday, which shall be submitted to the Trustees with the rest of our correspondence, I think that to find fault with my department implies a charge against myself; still more so as in your second letter you began by declaring that my first was "wholly unsatisfactory," that in the time of my predecessors things were better managed, by their requiring only the Title of the books wanted by readers, and no Press-mark, that "your next complaint" should be to the Trustees themselves, and concluded by stating that their attention "must shortly be called by the Public or by Government to the difficulties and delay arising from the present regulations and the state of the Catalogues in obtaining printed books." These are certainly charges, and I naturally expected that you would do me the favour to bring them before the Trustees, so that I might have an opportunity of proving them groundless.

I am glad that you now give me credit for good inten-

tions, but as you still consider that "many of my proceedings are detrimental to the Public and require to be altered," I shall feel obliged by your informing me what are the proceedings to which you allude. I presume that your unfavourable opinion of them is of a *recent* date.

Believe me,

My dear Sir,

Yours very faithfully,

A. PANIZZI.

Mr. Panizzi says of this letter—"I again called on him to specify his charges, and told him that his unfavourable opinions must be of a *recent* date."* If Mr. Panizzi paid any attention to accuracy of language, he would not have said that he had "*told me* that my unfavourable opinions *must* be 'of a recent date,'" inasmuch as what he did say was, "*I presume* that your unfavourable opinion *is* of a *recent* date;" and the distinction is material, because so positive an assertion as he says he used, might have warned me that he had some evidence in his possession that I had formerly expressed a different opinion. My reply was as follows:—

TO A. PANIZZI, ESQ.

Torrington Square, 24th May, 1846.

MY DEAR SIR,

I am favoured with your letter of yesterday. As you have referred our correspondence to the Trustees, and as my letters advert to those arrangements in your department which I consider detrimental to the Public, it is possible that I may be requested by the Trustees to state my objections more fully, when you will have an opportunity of answering them. If, however, the Trustees do not do so, you may be assured that you shall have ample information on the subject.

To enter into a personal discussion with a gentleman who is so perfectly satisfied of the propriety of his own measures, as to invite it, only that he may prove any objections to them "groundless," and who when complained to of a flagrant act of neglect in his department, thought proper to justify it, would manifestly be an utter waste of time. There must be an appeal to a higher authority, and which is the more necessary, because you may not be answerable for all, though you certainly are for most, of what seems to me improper in your department.

You are mistaken in supposing that my unfavourable opinion on those points is of a "*recent*" date. My sentiments respecting "Press-marks," &c., have long been entertained and expressed. I have also long thought that the delay in completing the Catalogue was unjustifiable, but not having carefully examined its plan until a few week ago, or been acquainted with your last Reports, I was not aware of its imperfections until lately. It is candid to acquaint you that the opinions which I entertain about "Press-marks," and the delay in obtaining printed books, are shared by every literary man to whom I have spoken, that no one can account for the delay in completing the Catalogue, and that none approve of its plan. The general feeling appears to be similar to my own, namely, that the effect of the system you have introduced, is to keep all the *working* part of literary men out of the library, until they are *actually compelled* to refer to it.

You must admit that this question is one of deep interest to literature; and as I do not imagine that you *desire* or *intend* to produce such results, I may, without any personal offence, presume to think that you have made some serious mistakes. Believe me,

My dear Sir,

Yours very faithfully,

N. HARRIS NICOLAS.

By this letter (however unsatisfactory he may now consider it*) he partially succeeded in his ob-

* He says, "He denied this (*i.e.* that my unfavourable opinions were of recent date), carefully avoiding entering into any particulars, but went

ject; for he had obtained, under my own hand, a statement that I disapproved of his *compelling* Readers to refer in every instance to the Catalogue for the Press-marks; but he was not pleased at my persisting in saying that my opinion was not a *recent* one. He saw, however, that I had utterly forgotten my letter of October 1837, and this was no slight advantage. I was presently to be struck with the poniard with which I had armed him; and the mode was worthy of the design. Continuing his friendly address (the concluding part of which he has suppressed), he then wrote the following letter:—

TO SIR N. HARRIS NICOLAS.

British Museum, May 25th, 1846.

MY DEAR SIR,

I have to acknowledge your letter of yesterday, and as, do what I may, I cannot prevail upon you to reduce to a definite and tangible shape the vague and serious charges which you have volunteered against me, I must have patience and wait till you bring them before the "higher authority" of which you speak, when, as you foresee, I may show that I am not "answerable for all," though you, with characteristic fairness, have begun by supposing that I was.

The only one of your charges about which you venture to come to something like particulars, that relating to the Press-marks, &c., I cannot avoid showing to be utterly "groundless," and I am confident that you will agree with me, in spite of your unfavourable opinion, which I persist in thinking "of a recent date."

The great object of a public library is dispatch in procuring books. This can only be secured by *perspicuity* in

on with generalities (No. VIII.), except as to 'Press-marks, &c.,' which he declared to be the source of delay."

describing them. In my humble judgment no better mode could possibly be devised for obtaining any particular work than the printed tickets which I suggested in 1837, and which are now in use. By specifying the Titles from the Catalogue, and copying from it the Press-marks, the applicant can at once identify the particular edition or copy of an edition which he requires. The importance of this to a critical student is obvious; and I cannot show the utility of the new system more forcibly than by appealing to your own experience, which will bear me out in saying that readers have often—before the introduction of those tickets—been assured that a book was not in the Museum, though they had themselves referred to it only a few days before. The requisition to insert the Titles and Press-marks on the tickets, is not merely reasonable, but it is indispensable, if the library is to be conducted with satisfaction to the Public and to the librarians. If people will not take the trouble to comply with rules, which, so far from being vexatious, are absolutely necessary for their own comfort, they can have no right to complain. The fault is *theirs* if mistakes or delay ensue; and it is as absurd as it is unjust to impute the effect of their own ignorance or carelessness to the Officers of the Museum.

I thank you for your candour in acquainting me “that the opinion which you entertain about ‘Press-marks’ and the delay in obtaining printed books is shared by every literary man to whom you have spoken.” To be as candid with you, I beg to say that the experience of every one who has been heard to speak of the Museum, has convinced him of the great improvements which have taken place since my last appointment. I now beg that you will do me the favour to give me your authority for your assertion; I shall be most happy to give you mine, for one so directly at variance with yours.

I am,

My dear Sir,

Yours very faithfully,

A. PANIZZI.

It need scarcely be said, that I had not the

slightest idea that this letter was otherwise than it appeared—namely, the genuine production of Mr. Panizzi's own mind—his own thoughts, his own arguments, and his own words. From any other correspondent, the pertinacity he displayed might, perhaps, have excited suspicion; but though I was convinced he had some crafty object in view, yet, having nothing to conceal, I had nothing to fear, and I thus replied to every part of that statement:—

TO A. PANIZZI, ESQ.

Torrington Square, 26th May, 1846.

MY DEAR SIR,

The sooner a correspondence with a gentleman who will not understand what would be perfectly intelligible to everybody else, who perverts the obvious meaning of courteous expressions, who affects to disbelieve a distinct assurance, and who ventures to accuse another of "unfairness," adding, that it is "characteristic," is concluded the better.

All which I have yet said of your proceedings, as Keeper of the Printed Books, is, as I have no doubt you are aware, before the Public; and I only wait until my comments are finished, to send you a copy of them "*from the author.*" You will find that, in my opinion,

- I.—You have introduced regulations into the Library which are vexatious and unnecessary, and impede research, by preventing literary men from consulting the books with facility and comfort.
- II.—That the new Catalogue is improperly delayed, and that its plan is injudicious, if not impracticable; and therefore that the money spent on its compilation is wasted.

With respect to "Press-marks," my objection is, as

you cannot but know, not to their being inserted in the Catalogue, to be used if a reader desires to identify a particular copy of a book, but *to your insisting, as a sine quâ non* to the delivery of any book whatever,—no matter how well known it may be—that the applicant shall refer to the Catalogue *and fill up five columns*, “*LITERALLY*,” including the “*Press-marks*.”—I say this is vexatious and unnecessary. In one hundred out of one hundred and five cases, the Title itself, written from memory, ought to be as (I repeat it) it was in the time of your predecessors, sufficient. If a particular edition is wanted, the applicant will not fail to specify it. If he has a doubt as to the title or edition, he will then refer to the Catalogue. But in my case, when I had copied both the Title and the Press-mark, I could not obtain the book, and you justify the neglect.

I entirely deny that your system causes a quicker delivery of books. On the contrary, I declare from experience, that the delay is now much greater than it was before you introduced your scheme. A reader is still, sometimes, told that a book is not in the library, though he may have used it only a few days before. Perhaps you may not have forgotten the Index to the Despatches of the Duke of Wellington, which you insisted, with “characteristic” gentleness, was not in the library, though I over and over again told you I had had it in my hands, within a week. I persisted, and the book was brought to me in ten minutes after your vehement assurances that it was not in the Museum! So much for the working of your system.

You say the fault in these cases is the applicant’s, for not complying with all your regulations, and you coolly talk of “imputing the effect of their own ignorance or carelessness to the Officers of the Museum.” I answer—that the Officers of the Museum have no right to impose regulations which are vexatious and unnecessary; which give useless trouble, and cause great loss of time. The applicants may almost as reasonably be expected to copy the whole of the first and last pages of books as what you require; and because an *unimportant* mistake is made as

to the date and size of a book, of which there is only one edition, and no similar title in the English language, the salaried Officer of the Institution refuses, or rather justifies his subordinate, in refusing the book; and thinks it decorous and proper to taunt him with "ignorance or carelessness."

There is nothing so attractive in this controversy, as to induce me to bring others into it; and if you do not choose to believe my assertion, I cannot help it. I have not presumed to doubt any thing you have said, nor to impute improper motives to your conduct. But courtesy is a matter of feeling, and I have no right to expect you to imitate me.

I must again say, that the matters under discussion can only be settled by a higher authority than yours. *You* have brought the subject before the Trustees—I have, as I usually do on subjects which concern the Public, laid the facts before the Public. You can vindicate your proceedings either to the Trustees or to the Public. I avow and maintain all I have, and all I may yet say; but I decidedly decline to continue this correspondence, because I am sure it can lead to no desirable result, and for the other reasons which I have assigned. I consider the subject one of a public nature, and regret to perceive that you are angry; for until your last letter, I had determined to avoid making any *personal remark* likely to displease you.

Believe me,

My dear Sir,

Yours very faithfully,

N. HARRIS NICOLAS.

I can have no sort of objection to your laying this, and my last letter, together with the communication which you will receive from me on Monday next,* before the Trustees, if you see fit.

Every Englishman—certainly every English gentleman, will learn with astonishment, that his letter

* *i. e.* The two articles which had appeared, and the third and last which would appear, in the "Spectator."

of the 26th of May* was a snare to entrap me into the inconsistency of refuting an opinion which I had, from a kind feeling towards him, expressed nearly nine years before, and which he knew I had entirely forgotten. Having, to his infinite satisfaction, seen me "greatly devour the treacherous bait," his success was notified to me in a manner which was perfectly in character with the whole proceeding ;—

TO SIR N. HARRIS NICOLAS.

British Museum, May 27th, 1846.

SIR,

I am surprised to find that the expressions which displease you most in my letter of the 25th instant are those which I transcribed *verbatim* from one which you volunteered to write to me in 1837, and of which I enclose a copy. You *then* warmly approved of those very arrangements which you *now* so violently condemn.

I call upon you to publish the enclosed along with the observations which you are to send me on Monday next, in order that all unprejudiced and sincere persons may judge what reliance is to be placed on the opinions and assertions of a man endowed with so flexible a judgment and so treacherous a memory.

I am, Sir,

Your obedient servant,

A. PANIZZI.

The courteous expressions of "My dear Sir," and "Yours very faithfully," of all his previous letters—the mask under which the intended victim was lured into confidence, give place to "Sir," and "I am, Sir, your obedient Servant," as soon as the object is attained. The act was worthy of its hero;

* Page 73 ante.

and as his official situation affords him ample opportunities for behaving in a similar way to others, to whom it may be of consequence, the history of this transaction may be advantageous to them.

My reply to that letter, it must be needless to say, concluded the correspondence ;—

TO A. PANIZZI, ESQ.

Torrington Square, 27th May, 1846.

SIR,

Your communication of this day induces me, most reluctantly, to add one more letter to our correspondence. It is proper that I should advert to my letter of the 20th October, 1837, of which you have made so candid and gentlemanly, and, if I condescended to imitate your style, I might say, so “characteristic” a use.

The production of that letter gives me neither surprise nor concern. I usually write and speak from the impression of the moment, and must occasionally expect, especially after an interval of nearly nine years, to find some inconsistencies in my opinions. In this case, however, the inconsistency is more apparent than real ; but be it great or small, you are welcome to any use you can make of it.

The facts, as you well know, were these :—In 1837, it seems, that I was not satisfied with the management of the Reading-room, as the time in obtaining printed books was greater than it had formerly been. You succeeded to the department, and introduced the rules which have in practice proved inconvenient, but which were supposed to do much within the first few weeks after your appointment to remedy the evil. It seems also that you made other improvements, and that the changes elicited my praise. Experience has, however, proved that I was mistaken, and I have long since seen my mistake. So long as the apparent effect lasted, it justified the apparent cause. It was better to give ten minutes to the Catalogue, than to wait three—not to say ten—times as long (as I have often

done of late) for a book. The additional trouble, however, remains, without the advantage which alone justified its imposition. It is really too much to oblige readers to waste their time over the Catalogue, and to revert to worse than the old delays. So long as your plan worked well I approved of it; for some years past it has worked ill, and I have condemned it. You wisely tried an experiment, but you unwisely continue the plan, though it has failed. I have no reluctance to avow a change in my opinions, whenever it has been produced by a change in the circumstances on which it was formed;—I have no respect for mulish obstinacy, or bigoted self-sufficiency.

You may be sure that if a convenient opportunity be afforded me for printing my letter to you in October, 1837, it shall (after collation with the original) be published; but I will not separate it from this correspondence. The English public would learn with astonishment the manner in which, by a series of *unmarked* quotations, a generous letter may be perverted to ungenerous purposes.

I am Sir,

Your obedient servant,

N. HARRIS NICOLAS.

P.S. Should you possess any letter from me commending the *Plan* of the Catalogue, I shall be very happy to add it to our recent correspondence.

Mr. Panizzi says,* in defence of his not having marked the passage by quotations, “The purpose for which I used his letter, was my own defence against his attacks,—his own former words being the most triumphant answer to his *recent* opinions; and I do not see why I should be found fault with, because I have shown that Sir Nicholas unsays *now* what he has formerly said, though he denied having said it.” How far it is just to assert, that I “unsay now what I formerly said,” because I think differ-

* Page 25.

ently of a measure after nearly nine years' experience of its working, from what I did a few weeks after its first trial, I will not determine; but I do most distinctly assert, that I never have "denied having said it;" and I challenge him to point out when, or where, I have made such a denial. Mr. Panizzi, however, knows well, that I had *forgotten* I had ever said it, and with that advantage he might have been contented.

It is hard upon Mr. Panizzi that he could not misuse my letter without incurring additional odium from a circumstance arising out of the impropriety.

My approval of the Press-marks in 1837 was founded, as has been often said, on the belief that they *always identify, not a press or a shelf, but every particular book in the Library*. Adopting the words of my letter, and making them his own by a change of pronouns, Mr. Panizzi *relies on such identification, as proof of their expediency*, and yet *he knew*, (though I did not) that in the very case under discussion the *Press-mark did not identify the book!*

I shall leave the inconsistency between my approval of the system in October 1837, a few weeks after it was tried, and my disapproval of it not merely now, but for several years past, (as I can prove by a reference to numerous persons,) where Mr. Panizzi has found it. My objection to that system is, however, greatly increased by the facts stated in Mr. Panizzi's pamphlet; viz., that it is not universally carried out, and that the Press-mark does not always identify the book.

Of the want of system in the management of the Library, the discrepancy in the Catalogues, the confusion which arises on the simplest difficulty, the manner in which the Attendants are allowed to blunder without any directing head to aid them; and worse than all, of the blindness of Mr. Panizzi to defects, and his obstinate persistence in error, I confess I had no idea until he was so good as to publish his pamphlet. I do not, however, absolutely despair of amendments. The Trustees cannot allow the present system to go on, and even if they desire to do so, the Public will not permit them. There *will* be a new Catalogue before 1854, in spite of all that Mr. Panizzi can do to prevent it, and it *will* be made on a totally different plan. What signifies it to him that a few thousand pounds have been wasted on an experiment?

Mr. Panizzi himself says, and his pamphlet is well worth the single assertion, that if I had written for any work according to his pattern model "there is no doubt he would have got the book in five minutes." That any books have been obtained out of the Library, for the last four years, in five minutes, I take leave to doubt; nor do I believe they ever will. But Mr. Panizzi has himself fixed the measure of time, and it cannot be too generally known. That it is *now* possible to obtain books in a very short time, *I know*, because since the publication of the articles in the *Spectator*, books have been brought to me as quickly as can reasonably be expected. Why this was not always done, and why it is now done, is explained by the simple fact that

the Librarian has been stimulated to perform his duty as vigilantly as he did immediately after his appointment in 1837, when I had the pleasure of bearing testimony to his zeal. The new broom of 1837 required a new handle in 1846; and it will be the fault of the Readers in the Library, if it again, gets out of repair. So long as that ogre of all lazy, corrupt, or incompetent functionaries — the Public Press may exist — “anonymous attacks in Newspapers,” if founded in truth, will be sure to correct abuses. Even Public Boards are penetrated by these missiles, though they may treat authenticated complaints with contempt.

There is an imputation against the Readers in the British Museum in the following paragraph of Mr. Panizzi's pamphlet, to which I beg leave to call their particular attention:—

“But although that letter sets forth what can be said in favour of the plan which it praises, it touches but slightly on those hindrances which carelessness or malice can alike produce to defeat its success. Any person who, from either cause, gives wrong references, who writes illegibly, who misdescribes a book, who mis-spells the name of an author, who asks for a large number of books at the same moment, who will not take the trouble to deliver his tickets to the proper person, but leaves them about to be lost or mislaid, who has recourse to the pettiest devices to create a grievance for the purpose of complaining of it, such a person will certainly be kept occasionally waiting;

and how can it be otherwise? Yet these are the very persons who complain most, avoiding, however, investigation, when they would be proved wrong, and writing anonymously to newspapers, stating truly, it may be, the fact of having been kept waiting, but taking good care to render it impossible to prove that it was by their fault. This is not all: the endeavours made to correct their mistakes and to decipher their hand-writing, take much time; and the delay is not unfrequently turned against the officers and servants of the Museum, who are actually found fault with for doing more than they are bound to do. Meanwhile, readers who have done all that is required of them are probably kept waiting; and though they may submit in silence to the inconvenience, they cannot help feeling dissatisfied with what seem to be defects in the management of the Library.”*

Thinking it possible that some part of those insinuations might be levelled at me, I considered it my duty to address the Trustees on the subject in a letter, which will be presently given; and unless Mr. Panizzi avows that the whole of his innuendoes are intended to apply only to me, the other Readers may feel as little pleased with this imputation of perverting names, dates, &c., on tickets, having recourse to “the pettiest devices to create a grievance” for the gratification of their “malice,” as I do. If, however, all or any part of these insinuations be intended for me, I fling them back with utter scorn upon their author. Base suspicions are

* Pages 8, 9.

the natural fruit of base minds; and they who know us both will, I apprehend, be more ready to believe that he can entertain contemptible and unjust suspicions, than that I can be capable of a mean or ungenerous action.

In the conclusion of his pamphlet, Mr. Panizzi says,—

“In the *Spectator*, too, he has indulged in making assertions, and passing sentence on every thing which he assumes that I have ever done, or now do. I shall not defend myself, except before a competent judge. Whenever an inquiry, which I have courted, (Letters No. IV. and V.) and still court, and from which Sir Nicholas Harris Nicolas has shrunk, and will shrink, shall take place, either before the Trustees, or before any ‘higher authority’ whatever, I will prove, what I stated in my Letter No. XI., that no reliance can be placed on his opinions and assertions. I shall take no further notice, either of anything that Sir N. Harris Nicolas may say, or of any anonymous attack whatsoever.”*

Thinking this, like the imputation about tickets, wholly unjustifiable, I immediately wrote to the Trustees the following letter:—

TO THE TRUSTEES OF THE BRITISH MUSEUM.

Torrington Square, 12th June, 1846.

MY LORDS AND GENTLEMEN,

Having had occasion to complain of neglect in the Printed Book Department of the British Museum, a cor-

correspondence has taken place between Mr. Panizzi and myself on the subject, which has, I understand, been laid before you. That correspondence has since been printed by Mr. Panizzi, with some prefatory remarks, in which the facts of the case, so far as they are within my knowledge, are misrepresented.* Most dishonourable conduct is imputed to some Readers in the Library,† if not to me; it is more than insinuated that I have been actuated by "malice," and I am accused of great meanness and wilful falsehood.‡

I shall not now deign to reply to these aspersions, nor inquire how far you may consider it fit and becoming in any Officer of the Museum to offer so gross an insult to a gentleman who has merely complained of neglect in his department, and fairly criticised a Catalogue printed at the Public expense. But as Mr. Panizzi has presumed, in reference to your Board, to say that I have "*shrunk, and will shrink*,"§ from any inquiry you may think proper to institute, I owe it to my own character to declare that I am most willing to repeat and maintain to you, or in any other place, everything I have said in my correspondence with Mr. Panizzi, and in the articles in the "*Spectator*," to which he alludes.

An opportunity will, I hope, be afforded to the general body of Readers in the Museum to vindicate themselves from the charges || brought against them in Mr. Panizzi's pamphlet. If he means to apply those charges to me, then I beg leave to demand from your justice, that he may be called upon to prove them to your Board.

I think it right to add, that my opinion that the Library is not properly managed has been much strengthened by Mr. Panizzi's own statement, ¶ viz., that though the *Title* and the *Press-mark* were correctly (and I submit legibly) written on a ticket, it required no less than six persons and an *hour's time* to find a *common* and well-known book!

It is farther material to observe, that instead, as I had

* Pages 10, 14. † Pages 8, 9. ‡ Pages 16, 17, 25, in the Note.
 § Page 17. || Pages 8, 9. ¶ Pages 13, 14, 15.

always supposed, of its being possible to identify every volume by the Press-mark, it appears from Mr. Panizzi's pamphlet* that that mark refers, in some instances, to the press and shelf only, and not to the book itself; so that the object for which the reader is required to insert it in the ticket is not attained.

I have the honour to be,
My Lords and Gentlemen,
Your most obedient humble servant,
N. HARRIS NICOLAS.

Being aware of Mr. Panizzi's influence, the answer to this letter did not much surprise me:—

TO SIR N. HARRIS NICOLAS.

British Museum, 18th June, 1846.

SIR,

Having laid before the Trustees your letter of the 12th instant, I am directed to acquaint you, that the Trustees have read the correspondence to which you refer, and, particularly, have given their attention to the complaint you make in your letter of the 18th May to Mr. Panizzi, regarding delay in the delivery of five books which you desired to consult in the Reading-room of the Museum.

The Trustees have confined themselves to the facts, as they appear upon the correspondence, without hearing Mr. Panizzi further in the matter. It appears from this correspondence that, with regard to four of the books, the delay was occasioned by the inexperience of the Attendant sent for them, who had not been long in the service of the Trustees, and that this fact was explained to you by Mr. Panizzi, with the expression of his regret. With regard to the fifth book, it is clear that the delay arose from your error in describing the volume.

Under these circumstances, the Trustees are of opinion that you have no reasonable ground of complaint upon this subject.

* Pages 12, 13.

I am directed to add, that if you, or any other gentleman in the habit of frequenting the Reading-room, conceive that you have any cause to complain of its management, your representations, if addressed to the Trustees in writing, will always receive full attention.

I have the honour to be, Sir,

Your most obedient servant,

J. FORSHALL, *Secretary*.

In this reply the most material parts of my letter are not even noticed. It is evident that the Trustees have thought it right and just to adopt Mr. Panizzi's statement without even inquiring into its correctness; and they have thus manifested the disregard usually shown by irresponsible Boards to complaints of neglect and mismanagement. The concluding paragraph of that letter is a model for all other Secretaries. A specific complaint is brought before the Trustees, which they dismiss in the most summary manner, upon the *ex-parte* representation, and almost in the very words* of the Officer whose department is blamed; and yet the complainant is coolly informed that "*if he conceives he has any cause to complain, his representations will always receive full attention.*" "Full attention!" Have they, in this instance, received the *slightest attention*? and who would again throw away a moment's time, be the grievance or the abuse what it may, in writing to the Trustees after such disrespectful treatment? Instead of stating my opinions on the Museum "in writing to the Trustees," to be as cavalierly disposed of on Mr. Panizzi's report as my complaint and letter have

* Vide pages 43, 44, *ante*.

been, they are now before the Public; and will receive, if not "full attention" from the Trustees, certainly the consideration of all who are interested about Literature, or in Literary Institutions.

That I was fully prepared for such a decision is shown by a passage in my remarks on the British Museum published before the matter complained of arose :—

"What is the natural and inevitable result of such an administrative body, in such an Establishment? Its government devolves on a few amateurs; and *matters requiring thorough investigation as well as profound and practical knowledge are decided upon the representations of the Officers*—the Trustees sometimes wrongly rejecting, and *sometimes as wrongly adopting their suggestions, according as the subject may be a hobby, or the recommending Officer a favourite.*"*

* Vide page 14, *ante*.

I fear they are now before the Table; and will
 receive it not "All attention" from the "Trustees"
 certainly the consideration of all who are interest-
 ed about literature, or in literary institutions.
 That I was fully prepared for such a decision is
 shown by a passage in my remarks on the British
 Museum published before the matter came up for
 consideration.

"What is the natural and inevitable result of
 such an administrative body, is such an Establish-
 ment? Its government devolves on a few ministers;
 and amidst requiring the most intricate and as
 profound and practical knowledge are decided upon the
 recommendations of the Officers—the Trustees sometimes
 strongly rejecting, and sometimes as wrongly adopting
 their suggestions, according as the subject may be a
 subject of the recommending Officer or otherwise."

• The page is blank.

