

## THE BRITISH MUSEUM AND ITS READING-ROOM.

SIR JOHN HERSCHEL somewhat unctuously called London "the centre of the terrene globe." Emerson says that all things precious, or useful, or amusing, or intoxicating are sucked into English commerce, and floated to London. A recent writer, speaking of the metropolis, says that "London is an epitome of the world, a museum of all human anatomies, a mirror for all the passions, a show-room for all the antiquities and splendors, a universal gala ground, and a perpetual mourning house." London is also the metropolis of the world's literature. Its literary memories are imposing, and are thickly strewn through all the years of four centuries. Every where, in its aristocratic squares and its business marts and its squalid purlieus, is London dotted with spots consecrated as the haunts of literary greatness. Who of the literary guild or with the book-reading passion would not rather see the Mitre Tavern than a royal procession, or have peeped, a little more than a year ago, into the little office of *All the Year Round* than have been received by a Secretary of State? Of all its wonders, we think most reverently of all of its antiquarian and literary wonders; and chief among these is the British Museum.

The British Museum is not only the resort of the curious in antiquities and the studious in ancient and modern lore—it is also a great popular resort, an inestimable boon to the masses. On Christmas-day in 1871 no less than 11,000 persons wandered through its corridors and gazed upon its treasures; ninety-nine out of every hundred of these were artisan laborers, their wives, and their children; and the police reported that, as was proper to a temple consecrated to letters and the arts, "the people were sober, orderly, and exceedingly well-behaved." The Museum has been thrown open to the general public for many years on every day excepting Saturdays, and during certain brief periods required for repairs, cleaning, and rearranging the contents. It occupies the site, in Great Russell Street, of two famous mansions which bore the name of Montague House, having been the residence of the Dukes of Montague; and the first nucleus of what is now the British Museum was the second of these edifices. It was considered at the time of its erection the most splendid private residence in London; and we may imagine the courtiers and wits of the Restoration and of Queen Anne thronging the hospitable ducal halls, which were not many years thence to be purchased by the nation, and to receive the earliest contribution to a national museum in the shape of Sir William Hamilton's Roman vases and curiosities.

Although Sir William Hamilton's collection was the first national possession which formed the beginnings of a museum, the credit of inaugurating the present noble institution must be given to a wealthy and benevolent disciple of Æsculapius. In 1753 Sir Hans Sloane died, leaving behind him not only a library comprising 50,000 volumes, but also an extensive museum of antiquities and rare works of art. He directed by his will that these should be sold to the government for twenty thousand pounds. A lottery was opened, with official sanction, to raise funds for establishing a national museum, and the sum of £95,194 produced thereby, and £20,000 of this was devoted to the purchase of the Sloane collection. To this was added the Hamilton collection, the Cotton and Harleian manuscripts—rich mines of wealth to the historian and biographer, in several thousand volumes—and such other unclassified antiquities as lay in the government offices.

Among the subsequent contributions were the Townley marbles (in 1805), the Gallery of Antiquities, the Greville minerals, the Elgin and Phigalian marbles, the libraries of King George III. (70,000 volumes, including some of the rarest and most precious of old tomes and volumes), of Sir Joseph Banks (16,000 volumes), of Dr. Burney (father of Fanny D'Arblay), of Lord Guilford, of M. Ginguené, of Mr. Grenville, and many others, the superb collection of Egyptian antiquities, and vast ornithological, mineral, antiquarian, and scientific collections, which now bewilder the eye to weariness as the vista of corridor after corridor opens to the sight.

The Museum, as it was in its Montague House days, is described as a charmingly cozy nook, surrounded by pleasant fields and gardens, and not, as now, shut in by closely packed brick squares and streets. Those fields were historic, in a manner. There not only were the cows of the nobility pastured, but the young bloods of the nobility were "pinked" in many a hot-headed duel; there Lord Eldon found refuge when, during the Corn-law riots of the Regency, the mob attacked his house near by; and there, on Sundays, the young men and women of two generations ago were wont to take their after-dinner strolls, coming thither from all directions. Among the *habitués* of the Museum when Cary, the translator of Dante, was one of the librarians, were Coleridge, Lamb, and Rogers, about whose visits there many stories are told. But even the magnificent house of the Dukes of Montague was soon found insufficient to hold the treasures that rapidly accumulated, and about forty years ago it gave place to the present structure.



The Museum of to-day appropriately harmonizes in its exterior with the extent and value of its contents. Its frontage on Great Russell Street—which, by-the-way, is one of the dirtiest and narrowest of London streets despite its sounding name—is no less than three hundred and seventy feet. Between the building and the street is a spacious paved court, bounded by high gilded railings. At the gate is a little porter's lodge, and here stands a very British-looking porter, to observe that those who enter are respectable and orderly in behavior. The building itself comprises a centre and two very broad wings; the whole is surrounded by a lofty colonnade of forty-four plain columns, with sculptured capitals, beneath which, in the central section, is a spacious portico, reached by a wide flight of steps. Over the main entrance is to be observed a large pediment, upon which appears an allegorical group representing "The Progress of Civilization," the work of Sir Richard Westmacott. This immense building is so dimmed, begrimed, and made sombre by the fogs and gusts and long, dreary storms of London that unless one looks closely he is not likely to observe the materials which compose it. These are immense blocks of stone, of which an English writer says: "Since the days of Trajan or Hadrian no such stones have been used as those employed at the British Museum, where eight hundred stones, of from five to nine tons' weight, form the front. Even St. Paul's Cathedral contains no approach to these magnitudes." It is only when you have entered the court and approached near to the edifice that you realize how vast it is; then it seems to dwarf the palaces and cathedrals, the public offices and club-houses, which have before seemed so imposing to the wanderer among London monuments. The extent of the building can not, however, be judged from the front view, and the seven acres which it covers can only be appreciated after the tour of the many galleries has quite exhausted the sight-seer in legs, eyes, and mind. Entering the hall from the portico, you find it to be constructed in the Doric style, and to be richly decorated in encaustic, and adorned by busts and statues of patrons of the Museum. There stands, also, the famous statue of Shakspeare, presented by Garrick, and Chantrey's statue of Sir Joseph Banks. In the hall are the offices of the custodians, stands for the sale of guide-books and catalogues, and repositories for canes and umbrellas. The ground-floor is divided into four sections: the hall, the galleries of sculpture on the left of the entrance, the library and manuscript apartments on the right, and immediately in front the corridor leading to the vast circular reading-room, which will be presently described.

It gives but an inadequate idea of the

Museum collection to say that it is the finest sculptural and antiquarian gallery in Great Britain; in some departments it is the rarest in the world. On turning to the left, after entering the vestibule, one finds a series of curiosities which have a peculiar interest as illustrating remote English history. This is the "Anglo-Roman Gallery." Here are seen the remains of the Roman works of useful and ornamental art which have been excavated from beneath modern London. During the economic and sanitary improvements which have been going on through the past forty years, mute witnesses of the ancient occupation of London by the Roman invaders have been from time to time discovered. These relics have been regularly accumulated at the Museum. Perhaps the most interesting are some old Roman tombs, strikingly like those which still stand on the Appian Way and in the Street of the Tombs at Pompeii, and Mosaic pavements, which Roman art could alone devise, and Roman skill alone execute. These relics are corroborative proof that London was a capital city very early in, or preceding, the Christian era. It is a tradition that Cæsar, coming to conquer the aborigines, found a colony of Flemings on the banks of the Thames; that these, from the width of the river at that point, called the place "Llyn-Dyn"—that is, "City of the Lake"—which name Cæsar Latinized to "Lundinium," or "Londinium," whence the modern appellation. A Roman bath was found in Billingsgate; on the hill where St. Paul's stands once stood the temple of Diana; and the Roman citadel, it is believed, reared itself on Tower Hill. The Museum exhibits not only tombs and mosaics, but lamps, weapons, amulets, urns, coins, and beads, whose appearance and inscriptions indicate in no doubtful manner the presence of a settled Roman civilization on the banks of the Thames. Passing further along, a most interesting series of busts of the Roman emperors, brought from Italy, is discovered; these take you back, with almost the vividness of a saunter through Pompeii, to the Cæsarian era, and reproduce the heroes and villains of the imperial city very clearly to the mind's eye. There is Cæsar Augustus, with his noble long head, his broad brow and thin lips, and his bold, strong nose; Nero, with gross, coarse face, fierce and brutal; Domitian, fat-chinned and bull-necked; Trajan, intellectual and bland; Antonine, with gently aquiline nose and genial smile; and handsome Marcus Aurelius, curly of hair, not unlike the busts of Alcibiades—the faces all so exquisitely cut by the sculptor's chisel that they seem living, and their lips about to part and speak. The next gallery, passing always around leftward, consists of the "Græco-Roman Saloons," where are many ancient sculptures of remarkable beau-



ty, as well as a bewildering multitude of military and domestic utensils, bejeweled, chased, and enameled ornaments, bass-reliefs, and coins. The most striking of these antiquities is the sculpture of the quoit-player (Discobolus) found among the ruins of Hadrian's villa at Tibur, which is again and again reproduced in our own parlors in Parian and plaster. "The Lycian Gallery" comes next in order, and thus we pass from remote to yet remoter civilizations—from Roman London to old Rome and Greece, and from these to that of Asia Minor. The antiquities of this gallery were brought from the Lycian cities, especially from Xanthus, whose splendid ruins Sir Charles Fellows discovered some thirty years ago. He removed its most valuable treasures to London, among them two great dome-shaped tombs of Lycian satraps. The "Egyptian Gallery" and the "Assyrian Gallery" are yet more replete with curiosities which at once symbolize and illustrate remote African civilization. In the former there are colossal idols—the Sphinx, Isis, and Osiris a hundred times repeated, sarcophagi and monuments, tombs of the Ptolemys and the Ramiseses, sepulchral tablets and statues of remote sovereigns, funeral vases and pillars—all crowded with the hieroglyphics which still puzzle the archæologist as well as amuse the merely curious. Memphis and Thebes are plentifully represented; there stands the colossal granite statue of Ramises II., from Thebes, and the granite lions from Nubia. In the Assyrian transept and gallery are to be found the treasures with which the perseverance of Layard has endowed the nation; the relics from Nineveh are of most important interest to the archæologist, and give clearer hints of the wonderful era of its grandeur than any thing hitherto discovered. Among them may be noted the bass-reliefs from Sennacherib's palace, the winged and human-headed lions and bulls of Nimroud, the monuments of Sargon, who led the Ten Tribes into captivity, contemporary hieroglyphics describing the exploits of Sardanapalus, and inscriptions recounting the story of Nebuchadnezzar! Not less suggestive in the Assyrian galleries are the glass and the ivory, the bronzes, mosaics, and musical instruments, the seals and playthings in common use among the Assyrians of old; here, too, you see the products of the religious fancies of this great people—the winged figures, the sacrificing monarchs, the half-eagle, half-lion monster who typified the struggle between the powers of good and evil, and that winged circle which is supposed to have been a symbol of the Assyrian God.

In 1802 Lord Elgin, then ambassador to the Sublime Porte, received permission from the Sultan to ransack the Parthenon at Athens, which city happened to be under

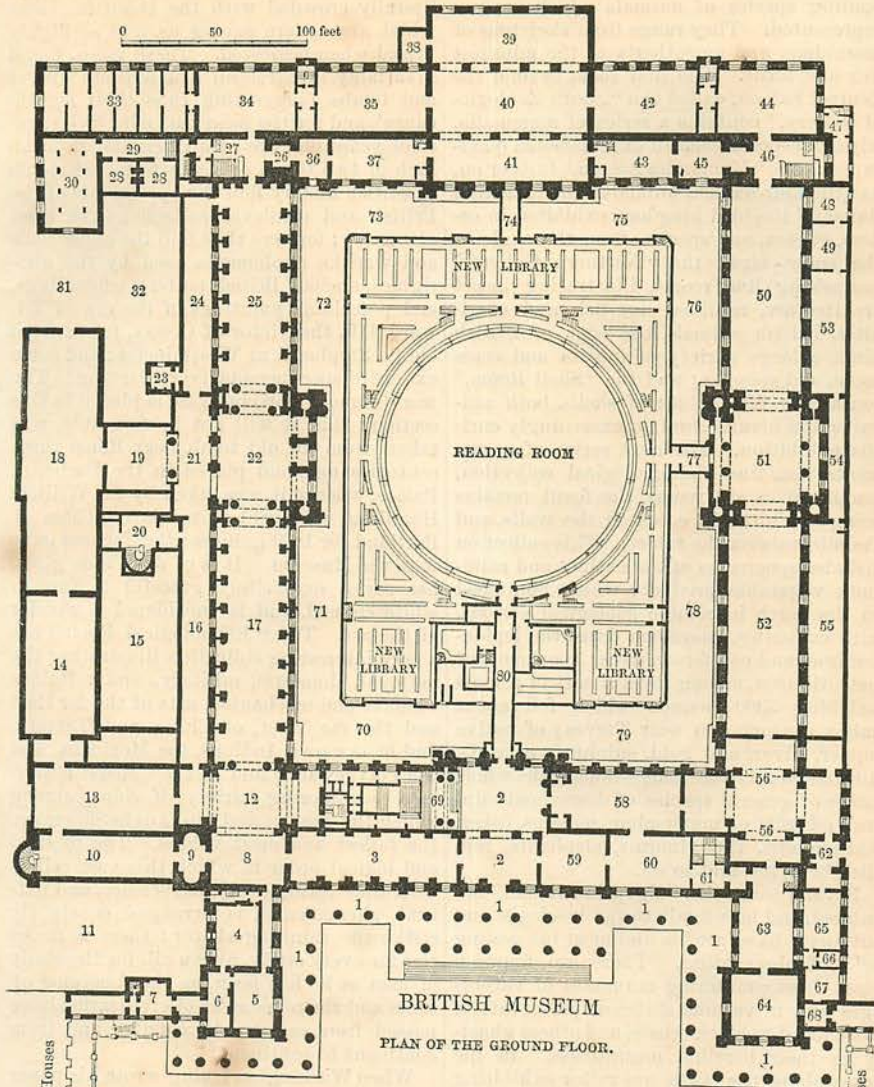
temporary Turkish dominion, and to carry off therefrom whatsoever he might choose. The privilege was made the most of: the eager ambassador proceeded not only to strip the Parthenon of the treasures it still contained, but to take down and ship off parts of the edifice itself. These are now to be seen in the "Elgin Saloon" in the British Museum, and are familiarly known as the "Elgin Marbles." The pediment of the Parthenon, with its splendid bass-reliefs and its perfect proportions, is there, and may be compared with a model of the temple which is placed on a table just by it. There, too, are the metopes and the frieze, the latter representing the battles of the Centaurs and the Lapithæ. The sculptures in the Elgin Saloon confirm the highest judgment of the perfection which sculpture as an art reached among the Greeks; even the fragments speak to us of their wonderful skill and taste, and the refinement of their conceptions of the beautiful. One of the most precious privileges of the Museum is that we are able to compare races and ages by their works; and a comparison, even by a superficial modern eye, between the Assyrian or Lycian and the Greek antiquities here preserved is enough to convince one of the immeasurable superiority of the latter in delicacy of imagination and cunning of execution.

The last of the antiquarian galleries on the ground-floor is the "Phigalian Saloon," containing curiosities discovered by Chandler at Phigalea, an Arcadian city, in 1765.

These ground-floor apartments present a most attractive panorama of the arts and usages of the older nations, with their sculptures, their articles of ornament, their bronzes, vases, terra cottas, medals, bass-reliefs, tools, weapons, garments, wax figures, paintings, tablets, furnitures—collections illustrating the customs and manners, the military science, the religious ceremonies, and the thrifty arts of the Chinaman and the African, the Indian and the Mexican, the Greek, Roman, and Egyptian; and coins of all metals—histories themselves in suggestive epitome.

Ascending the broad staircase in the vestibule, the upper story is reached. Here, first of all, one enters the spacious apartments which embrace a noble and wonderfully comprehensive collection of zoological specimens. Darwin must have reveled in the choice varieties of the ancestors of his race which here glare out from the glass cases on every side, and paid especial deference to the immense black, and certainly *almost* human, gorilla who occupies a conspicuous position in the middle of the "Central Saloon." He has stately company in two enormous stuffed giraffes, and many varieties of apes, monkeys, antelopes, goats, and bears. The zoological apartments, which comprise five or six long rooms, are scientifically classified, and there are few known





BRITISH MUSEUM  
PLAN OF THE GROUND FLOOR.

- 1. Front Colonnade.
- 2. Entrance Hall.
- 3. Roman Gallery.
- 4. Antiquities.
- 5. Antiquities.
- 6. } New Staircases.
- 7. }
- 8. First Græco-Roman Saloon.
- 9. Second Græco-Roman Saloon.
- 10. Third Græco-Roman Saloon.
- 11. Area.
- 12. Assyrian Transsept.
- 13. Lycian Gallery.
- 14. First Elgin Room.
- 15. Assyrian Basement Room.
- 16. Nimroud Side Gallery.
- 17. Southern Egyptian Gallery.
- 18. Second Elgin Room.
- 19. Hellenic Room.
- 20. Passage and Staircase.
- 21. Nimroud Central Saloon.
- 22. Egyptian Central Saloon.
- 23. Area.
- 24. Kouyunjik Gallery.
- 25. Northern Egyptian Gallery.
- 26. Northwest Stairs altered.
- 27. Vestibule.

- 28. Passage.
- 29. Entrance to Lower Gallery.
- 30. Entrance to West Gallery.
- 31. West Gallery for Antiquities.
- 32. Basement Gallery for Antiquities.
- 33. Arched Library.
- 34. North Library.
- 35. North Library.
- 36. Northwest Lobby.
- 37. Cracherode Room.
- 38. Study.
- 39. North Central Library.
- 40. Centre of North Library.
- 41. South Central Library.
- 42. North Library.
- 43. Banksian Room.
- 44. North Library.
- 45. Northeast Lobby.
- 46. Northeast Staircase.
- 47. Transcribers' Room.
- 48. Study.
- 49. Sorting-Room.
- 50. North End of Royal Library.
- 51. Centre of Royal Library.
- 52. South End of Royal Library.
- 53. East Additional Library.
- 54. East Additional Library.

- 55. East Additional Library.
- 56. Manuscript Saloon.
- 57. Assistant Keeper's Room.
- 58. Grenville Library.
- 59. Waiting-Room.
- 60. South Manuscript Room.
- 61. Passage and Staircase.
- 62. Study.
- 63. Manuscript Room.
- 64. Manuscript Room.
- 65. Sorting-Room.
- 66. Washing-Room.
- 67. Dusting-Room.
- 68. Lobby.
- 69. Principal Staircase.
- 70. Area round New Library.
- 71. Area round New Library.
- 72. Area round New Library.
- 73. Area round New Library.
- 74. Connecting Passage.
- 75. Area.
- 76. Area.
- 77. Connecting Passage.
- 78. Area.
- 79. Area.
- 80. Entrance to Reading-Room.

Officer's Houses

Officer's Houses



leading species of animals which are not represented. They range from skeletons of mastodons and megatheria to the minutest fish and birds. The first room beyond the Central Saloon, called the "South Zoological Gallery," contains a series of mammalia, with an especial wealth of four-footed quadrupeds; the "Mammalia Saloon," further on, has the four-handed animals; the "Eastern Gallery," the bird kingdom, exhibited in orders, genera, and species, from the eagle to the snow-bird; the "Northern Gallery," comprising five rooms, illustrating insect architecture, reptiles, star-fish and encri-nites, British animals, the eggs of British birds, a large variety of insects and crustacea, and sponges; and the "Shell Room," containing fifty tables of shells, both univalve and bivalve, and an exceedingly curious exhibition. The next series of apartments contains the geological collection, comprised in six rooms, the fossil remains being exhibited in cases on the walls, and the minerals on the tables. This collection includes specimens of the extinct and mammoth vegetable products which flourished on the earth in remote geological periods, with calamites, enormous ferns, the lepidodendron, and coniferous trees; specimens of meteoric iron, among them a part of a mass weighing 3300 pounds which fell about half a century ago near Treves; of native copper, silver, and gold, sulphuric crystals, silicates, beryls, emeralds—indeed, the whole range of general species of discovered minerals; fossils of mammalian remains, fishes, ichthyosauri, the dinornis, elephants, reptiles, bivalves, and so on.

Beyond these the "Egyptian Rooms" are entered, and here again the archaeologist and antiquary have a wide and most interesting field of observation. There are fourteen glass cases containing mummies of various ages and in various states of preservation, some dried to black crusts, and others ghastly in their horrible naturalness. In the cases along the walls are relics exhibiting the customs and usages of the subjects of the Ptolemys and Ramiseses, among them ornaments, domestic utensils, official and priestly costumes, works of art, and idols, porcelain and stone figures, articles of toilet, mirrors, dye-cases, and *hair-pins*; here, too, are boxes with paints, palettes, ink-bottles, pen-cases, writing tablets; trade implements, such as a carpenter's mallets, drills, and chisels; the Egyptian housewife's needles and thread, and Egyptian infants' dolls. Bricks, terra cotta figures, Greek and Etruscan bronze-works, and mural paintings from Pompeii, with some precious pieces of Greek and Roman sculpture, are to be found in the "Temple Room," this collection having been formed and given to the Museum by Sir William Temple. Lovers of antique *vertu* would delight in the "Etruscan Rooms," which are

literally crowded with the beautiful vases which are so rare among us, and so highly prized when possessed. These vases, found invariably in Etruscan and Grecian graves and tombs (suggesting thus their significance), and for the most part over two thousand years old, are of all heights, from an inch or two to six or seven feet. Students of British history find the apartments of the British and medieval collections the most attractive; for here they find the stone tools and warlike implements used by the aborigines, ancient British pottery, enamels, and porcelain; paintings of the era of Edward III., the victor of Cressy, taken from old St. Stephen's, at Westminster; and some exquisite specimens of ivory carving. The world-famous Portland vase is placed in this section; this, it will not be forgotten, was taken from an old tomb near Rome three centuries ago, and placed in the Barberini Palace, whence it was taken by Sir William Hamilton, who sold it to the Duchess of Portland for 1800 guineas; the duchess gave it to the Museum. It is of dark blue glass, has seven exquisitely graceful figures in white enamel, and is considered a wonder of the art. The "Ethnological Room" has a very interesting collection illustrating the national, domestic, military, and religious customs and mechanical arts of the far East and the far West, of China and Tartary, and of our own Indians, the Mexicans, and the Polynesians; and in the "Medal Room" is a bewildering variety of coins, among which the Roman and the Anglo-Saxon are the fullest and most valued. The method and logical order in which this vast collection, illustrating every art, science, and natural phenomenon, is arranged constantly strike the thinking visitor; there is material for every study, above all, for the study of man as he has been, as the dominion of arms and the refinement of civilization have passed from country to country and from continent to continent.

When Washington Irving wrote his paper on "The Art of Book-making" in the "Sketch Book," and said of the British Museum Library that it was "an immense collection of volumes of all languages, many of which are now forgotten, and most of which are seldom read," the library contained about 115,000 volumes; in 1835 the number had swelled to over 200,000; and to-day the sum total of volumes exceeds a million. The beginning of the library was the Sloane collection, in 1757, said to be 50,000 volumes. To this King George II.—perhaps because he, a dapper little German, couldn't read English, or, if he could, cared nothing for books, nor for any thing except his horses and his fat old mistresses from Faderland—added the royal library, which had been accumulating at the palaces ever since the days of Henry VII., miserly but valiant Richmond of the play.



This royal library is very curious: it consists of English theological and historical works, some Latin classics, and many Spanish and Italian works, besides rare vellum-bound and illuminated volumes, presentation copies to their majesties. A yet nobler royal gift was made to the Museum by George IV., seven years before his death (1823), of the splendid library of his poor old father, George III. This was the library which had thrown Samuel Johnson into such an ecstasy on a memorable occasion. One of the Museum librarians says of it: "The library of George III. is not confined to any particular class of literature, but embraces almost every species of human knowledge. It is a judicious selection of the best authors in all departments of literature and science, particularly in history, and comprises a rich collection of the earliest and rarest productions of the press." It would take up more space than is at our disposal to enumerate the precious curiosities of this library; Caxton's books abound, and so do Wynkyn de Wade's, and Pynson's. Here is Le Fevre's "Troy" (Caxton, 1470); the "Book of St. Alban's," 1486; many books with the autographs of the famous owners or authors, among them Lord Bacon, Michael Angelo, Charles I., Essex, Katherine Parr, Ben Jonson, Luther, Milton, Newton, Voltaire, Swift, and Sir Walter Scott; the "first Reformed Prayer-Book of Edward VI.," printed in 1549; and a multitude of others not less curious. It may be added that this collection includes the first edition of several of Shakspeare's plays, and that in the general catalogue of the Museum the heading "William Shakspeare" fills *two folio volumes*. There are first editions of almost every famous English work extant. The Museum contains seventy-five different editions of "Pilgrim's Progress" in English, and twenty-nine in other languages, including Arabic and Bengalee; seventy-two of "Paradise Lost" in English, and fifty-two in other tongues; seventy-four of "Robinson Crusoe" in English, and twenty-six in other tongues—and so on for many pages, had we the pages to spare in which to include all that is curious under this head. From the two royal libraries one may observe the literary tastes of the English sovereigns. Elizabeth seems to have been an attentive reader; Henry VIII. read very little, but had enough sense to preserve his father's books; Charles I., as well as his pedantic father, James I., liked religious, political, and philosophical works; Charles II., what little he read, evidently preferred light literature; George III. probably read a great deal of history; the other Brunswickers nothing at all.

To the libraries thus united at the Museum were added gradually many private collections, some of which have already been generally mentioned. Of these the most im-

portant, perhaps, was that of the Right Hon. Thomas Grenville, who died in 1846, at the age of ninety-one, after a stirring public career. Mr. Grenville was a relative of Pitt's, and was the English plenipotentiary who negotiated the peace between America and England, after the Revolution, with Dr. Franklin; he was afterward First Lord of the Admiralty in Fox's "cabinet of all the talents," of which his brother was Premier. His library comprised about 20,000 volumes, and included rare editions of Homer, Æsop, the Bible, the Latin classics (among them the Aldine Virgil, 1505), and of the older English poets and historians. The contributed libraries of Dr. Burney, Dr. Tyrwhitt, Sir R. Musgrave, and Sir Joseph Banks added many valuable works and series, while the annual purchases of foreign works, and the law requiring every English publisher to furnish copies of all publications gratis to the Museum, increase the library by about 20,000 volumes a year. Besides the collection of bound volumes, there are immense masses of pamphlets, newspapers, periodicals, and manuscripts. The newspaper files are replete with interest. The earliest of these bears the date of 1601, seven years before Milton's birth, and when Shakspeare was in his prime. Therein may be found accounts of Elizabeth's state balls, where gallant Raleigh and astute Bacon attended; the discontents of Charles I.'s time may be traced—at first obscurely hinted, then growing always more distinct, until the catastrophe comes; the sanctimoniousness of the Commonwealth, the relapse of the Restoration, may be noted; you may find echoes of the wars of factions and churches in the days of the last Stuart, and court circulars in which Addison is presented to majesty, and "literary notis" announcing the completion of a new poem by "A. Pope, Esquire," or a biting satire by "the Reverend Jonathan Swift;" how "last night Duke Hamilton and my Lord Mohun fought in Hyde Park—my lord is dead of his wound;" and then you come to the name of Pitt, *pitting* page after page with the brief, pregnant name, and the Napoleonic hurly-burly; Waterloo, in the biggest of types known half a century ago; and so on, down to the American civil war, and the fierce battles of Frank and Teuton in 1870.

The manuscript department has made many a secret and sealed book of the past a living letter in the hands of such historians as Hallam, Froude, Stanhope, and Lecky. Many of its contents are contributions by the state of unofficial memoirs and correspondence which before had lain musty and neglected in the State Paper and other offices. To these have been gradually added private collections of manuscripts left by statesmen, chroniclers, and antiquarians, of which the chief are, the Cottonian manu-



scripts, collected by Sir Robert Cotton, bought by the nation in 1701; the Harleian manuscripts, in 7639 volumes; the Lansdowne, 1245 volumes; the Royal, 1950 volumes; the Sloane, 4100 volumes; the Arundel, 550 volumes; the Burney, 524 volumes; the "Additional" (miscellaneous), 15,000; and 4000 "Oriental" manuscripts. The exhibition of some of the manuscripts and letters of which the Museum is the repository, in the library apartments on the left of the entrance hall, is one of the most interesting in the building. There are choice specimens of the original works and handwritings of the famous in war, literature, politics, and royalty, carefully preserved in glass cases, and visible to all the world. The believer in the theory that handwriting is an index of character has here a fertile field for study. Here is an old mortgage deed, bearing the quaint and almost illegible signature, "William Shakespeare;" and just by, an agreement, written and signed by John Milton, in which he disposes of "Paradise Lost" (April, 1667) to Samuel Simmons, the terms of sale being five pounds down, five pounds more when thirteen hundred were sold, and five pounds additional for each additional thirteen hundred sold. Samuel Rogers, who bought this document for one hundred guineas, presented it to the Museum. The old feudal days are vividly reproduced by the original charters granted to the barons by William Rufus and Henry I.; and more curious than all is the identical Magna Charta, wrung from John Lackland, old and yellow, the writing almost gone, torn, musty, but still bearing the marks of royal assent in the illumination and a pitiful remnant of the royal seal. There is a legal document signed by Edmund Spenser, the original manuscripts of Sterne's "Sentimental Journey," Johnson's tragedy of "Irene," Scott's "Kenilworth," Pope's "Iliad," Macaulay's History, and one of Ariosto's longer poems; a dispatch written in Wellington's own hand on the field of Waterloo; and in the same case a plan of the battle of the Nile, drawn with pen and ink by its victor, Lord Nelson and Brontë; the original "Basilikon Doron," the literary "royal gift" of James I. to a grateful nation; the will of poor Mary Queen of Scots; the wise diary, in a very handsome hand, of John Locke; Frederick the Great's pederaries, written in atrocious French, and in a small, nervous, cramped hand; the journal, in an ill-spelled, soldierly scrawl, of unfortunate young Monmouth, who tried to conquer the crown of England; a poem of Tasso's; autographs of almost every English sovereign from Richard the Lion-Hearted to her present majesty, of Peter the Great, Catherine de Medici, Gustavus Adolphus, Charles XII., and a host of French Henrys and Louises; characteristic letters of Raleigh, Wolsey, Knox, Leicester, Montrose, Bacon, New-

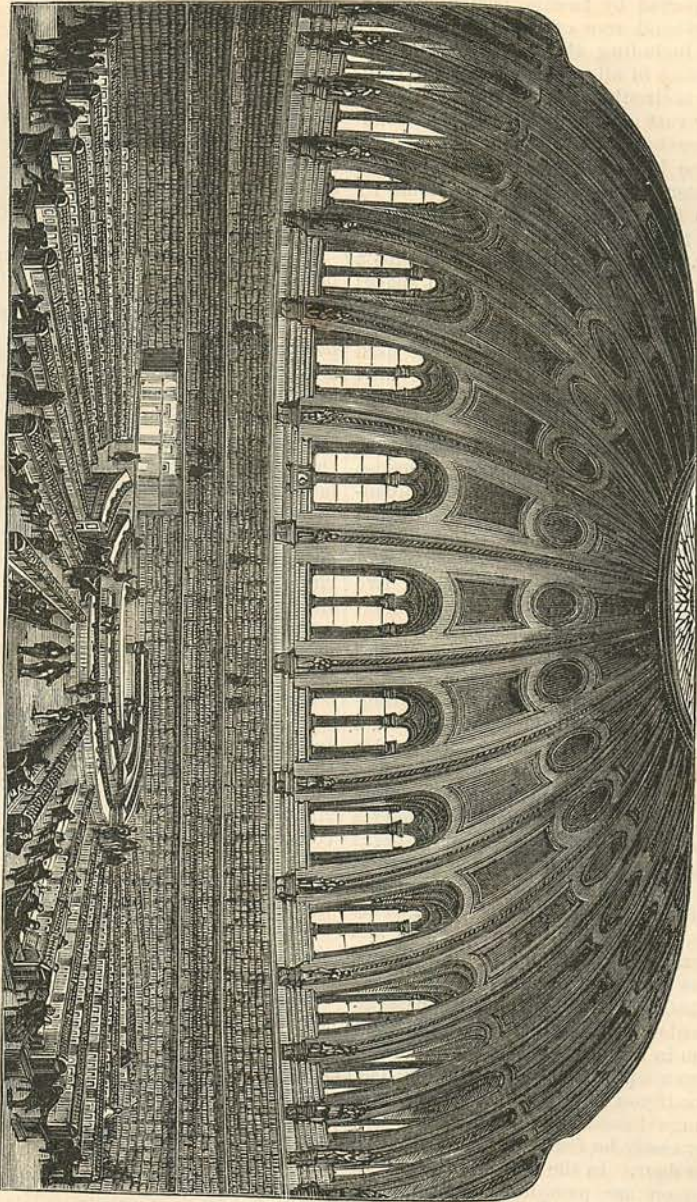
ton, Johnson, Voltaire, Marlborough, and Rupert; of Rubens, Rembrandt, Vandyck, and Hogarth; of Leibnitz, Galileo, Descartes, Pascal, Goethe, and Schiller; of Racine, Corneille, and Molière; of Dryden, Addison, Swift, and Pope; the Pitts and the Foxes, Sheridan and Burke, Byron, Wordsworth, Coleridge, and Scott. The curiosities of this and the contiguous apartments, in the shape of illuminated books, prints, engravings, illustrations, specimens of decoration and binding, are an epitomized history by example of the progress of the various arts which enter into the science of book-making, and the reproduction of painting and sculpture on paper.

The great reading-room of the Museum is the almost daily resort of many of the men and women whose names are famous here as there, yet such is the democracy of its government, the humblest and obscurest of authors, would-be authors, amateur dabblers in books, and mere pleasure-seeking novel-readers may, by complying with certain forms, jostle the world-renowned poet at the threshold, or sit cheek by jowl with an essayist and reviewer in the luxurious, leather-bound arm-chairs provided for all the world. One, as he sits there, is sometimes startled, as he refreshes his eyes a moment by glancing off his book and round upon his neighbors, to see just beside him a familiar face—a face that has many a time looked out on him from frontispieces of half-calf volumes, or in the windows of photographers and bookstores. So, cozily ensconced in a spacious fauteuil, with a pile of books which have been summoned from the vasty ocean of surrounding shelves scattered about the desk, have I many times recognized these historic faces. More than once the rotund figure and fat, red, Falstaff features of Mark Lemon bustled by; I have seen the tall, boyish form, deathly white and thoughtful, yet youthful face, of Swinburne, sitting close over his books; Browning, true poet's face, calm, deep, large, dark eyed, gray-haired, and gray-bearded; Lewes, the philosopher, and his illustrious wife, George Eliot; Froude, seeming more like a scholarly New Englander than like an Old Englander, with fine, contemplative, pale, thinnish features, and a sharp, penetrating, brown eye; once, the venerable and never-to-be-forgotten head and form of Carlyle, with large brow, deep-sunken eyes, and shaggy white hair and beard; Charles Reade, with his full face, small eyes, and bald crown; and Wilkie Collins, with full beard and mustache, large, round, blue eyes, and quick, prompt manner.

The small collection at Montague House was not accessible to the literary world without much red tape and difficulty. In July, 1759, there were only five readers who enjoyed the privilege of the reading-room. Only the privileged few could reach it. As



INTERIOR OF THE NEW READING-ROOM.



the accumulations of curiosities and books went on, the aristocratic old mansion became crowded to excess. But no steps were taken to improve the accommodations until 1845, when, after much agitation of the conservative British mind, Montague House was leveled to the ground, and the present palace erected on its site, the building being completed in 1847. Even this was found too small to properly accommodate the now greatly increased library. The room was all taken up by the antiquities, the arts, the sciences. It was not till 1854 that

Parliament was induced to make a grant of over £100,000 for new buildings and fittings, which included £61,000 "for the erection of a building within the interior quadrangle" (the Museum being built as a hollow square), "for the purpose of affording increased accommodation."

The new reading-room was thereupon begun, and completed in three years, receiving additional grants, which brought the expense of its erection up to the sum of £150,000. It was constructed mainly of iron, with brick arches between the main



ribs, supported by twenty iron piers, having a sectional area of ten superficial feet to each, including the brick casing—two hundred feet in all. The form of the reading-room is circular; it is crowned by a magnificently vast and noble dome, whose diameter is one hundred and forty feet, and its height one hundred and six, being inferior in diameter to the Pantheon at Rome by only two feet, and of larger dimension by one foot than the dome of the basilica of St. Peter. The circular room contains a million and a quarter cubic feet of space; and the outlying rooms, used for book depositories, contain 750,000 cubic feet more. Over two thousand tons of iron were used in the construction of the apartment, the weight of the materials comprised in the dome being four thousand two hundred tons, giving a weight of two hundred tons resting upon each pier. This immense apartment does not entirely fill the quadrangle formed by the four wings of the Museum building, spaces of twenty-five or thirty feet being left for ventilation and air on all sides. The roof contains two separate spherical and concentric air-chambers, extending over the whole surface, one to equalize the temperature during extremes of heat and cold out-of-doors, the other to carry off the vitiated air from the reading-room. The sky-lights, lanterns, and windows throughout the building are double glass, to avoid the effects of condensation.

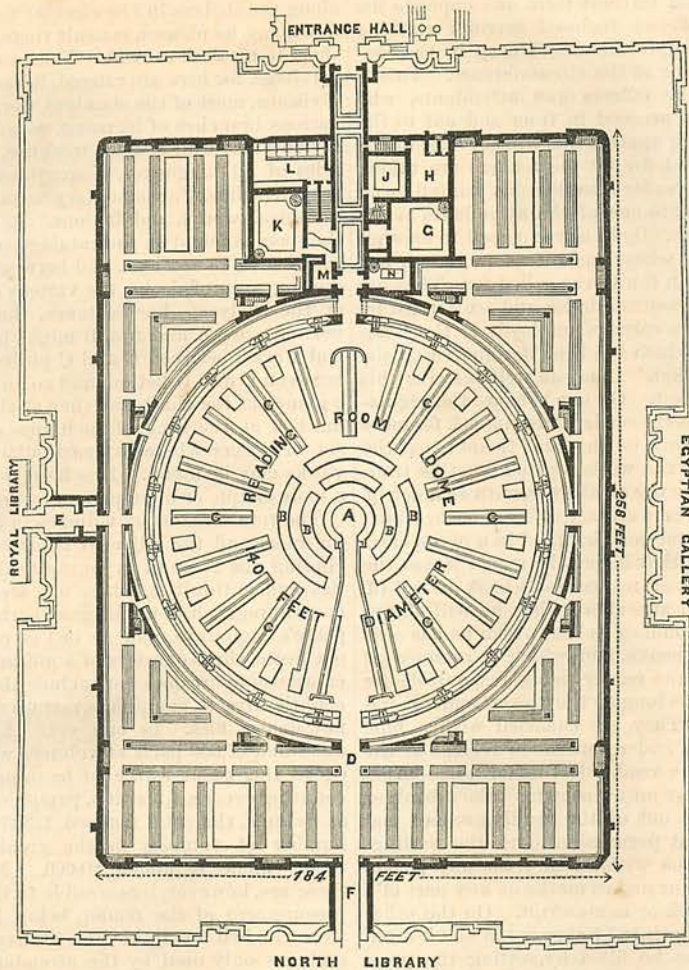
Entering the front yard of the Museum by the high, gilt-tipped gate, you pass along a paved walk, and ascend the spacious flight of stone steps leading to the main entrance. You pull open the swinging door, and find yourself in the high, gray, somewhat gloomy vestibule, whence branch off to right and left the galleries, crowded with the collected curiosities and wonders of the world. But directly before you is a long, matted passage-way, guarded at the nearer end by two red-faced men in uniform. These permit you to pass if you are provided with a reading-room ticket; or if you merely wish to take a peep at the huge domed room, a superior custodian may easily be found to conduct you to the inner door. In the passage-way is a table, whereon are pamphlets, guides, catalogues, manuscript lists, and so on, descriptive of the library, for sale at trifling prices. A little further is a little apartment opening on the corridor where a highly respectable old functionary, with the (in England) rather ornamental red nose and white neck-tie, and having a large metal label hanging on his breast, receives and tickets the hats, cloaks, umbrellas, and canes of the incomers, a significant notice on the wall forbidding any one to fee him for this service.

At the glass door you stand still, amazed at the scene before you. Whatever one may have imagined that reading-room to be, I

think it will, at first sight, strike him with wonder. The other side of the room seems literally a great distance off; the dome impresses with real awe, so high is it, so vast its proportions, so perfect its gigantic symmetry. Then the bewildering, unconceived multitude of books—shelves on shelves, tier after tier, section after section, story on story—rising from the floor to the curve of the dome; compact, complete through the whole immense circle!

The arrangements and fitting up of the interior of the reading-room appear to have taxed and rewarded the ingenuity of some master planner, so perfectly adapted to the purpose are they. In the very centre of the circle is a circular inclosure, within which, on a raised platform, are the desk of the superintendent, and the counters where are stationed the clerks and attendants. Along these counters you may see piles of books, to be delivered in due order to the readers, or to be returned in due order to the shelves. Outside these circular raised counters, with an interval of space between, is another circle of counters on the floor, and outside this, with another interval, a third circle of counters. These have open shelves underneath, where, in long rows, are the ponderous tomes, ranged completely around the circles, which comprise the catalogue of the library. These are at first bewildering enough. Indeed, one has to learn the science of using this reading-room before he can use it at all. The mysteries of pitching upon the right tome, and of learning the at first incomprehensible numbers and hieroglyphics with which they are filled, require time and patience; indeed, it is a sort of preliminary drilling to teach one how to study the books themselves with method. Several of these large tomes are catalogues to the catalogues; and by them, in process of time, one gets to learn how to find a subject or author with little difficulty and delay. Some of the shelves under the counters contain gazetteers, dictionaries, and indexes of many sorts. On the counters are placed pens and ink, and printed tickets, having on one side the regulations to be observed by readers in applying for and returning the books or manuscripts, and on the other a form to be filled up with certain particulars describing the works sent for, and stating the number of the desk the reader has chosen. The readers' seats and tables diverge as radii from these central counters toward the circumference. There are thirty-five of these tables; eight, thirty-four feet long, accommodate each sixteen readers on either side; nine, thirty feet long, fourteen readers; two, thirty feet long, eight readers (these two being reserved for the exclusive use of the lady readers); sixteen, six feet, accommodating two readers each. There is in the reading-room ample and comfortable pro-





PLAN OF NEW READING-ROOM, BRITISH MUSEUM.

- |                           |                                    |                            |
|---------------------------|------------------------------------|----------------------------|
| A. Superintendent.        | E. Entrance from Royal Library.    | K. Gentlemen's Cloak Room. |
| B. Catalogue Tables.      | F. Entrance from North Library.    | L. For Gentlemen.          |
| C. Readers' Tables.       | G. For Registration of Copyrights. | M. Umbrella Room.          |
| D. Access for Attendants. | H. Ladies' Cloak Room.             | N. Assistants' Room.       |
|                           | J. Attendants' Room.               |                            |

vision for about three hundred readers at one time; each desk gives a space of over four feet to its occupant. A division or screen runs longitudinally across the desks, dividing one row of readers from the opposite row; both rows facing toward the screen. This screen is provided with a hinged desk, graduated on racks, and a leather-covered shelf, which folds into the screen, for holding books. An inkstand is fixed in the screen next this shelf, with penholders containing quills freshly distributed every morning. The desk is broad and covered with black leather. It is made of iron, and its frame-work contains air-distributing channels, contrived so that the ventilation is at the top of the screen, above the heads of the readers; this apparatus is

freely controlled by valves. Beneath the feet is a tubular foot-rail passing from end to end of the rows of desks, wherein, in cold weather, is introduced a current of warm water, of great comfort to the damp feet just out of the snow. The catalogue counters are supplied with a similar ventilating and heating apparatus, their pedestals themselves being tubes, which communicate with the air-chamber below. The whole reading-room is fitted with hot-water pipes, set in radiating lines. A shaft, sixty feet high, supplies the fresh air, and the apparatus admits a supply of fresh air for five hundred persons at the rate of ten cubic feet per minute. Summer ventilation is provided for by steam-pipes, which on the roof and dome are heated, and extract the foul air. On the side



of the room furthest from and opposite the entrance is an inclosed corridor running from the superintendent's desk in the centre to a door at the circumference. This is used by the officers and attendants, who through it proceed in from and out to the surrounding apartments, whence most of the books called for by the readers are taken. When the reader has filled his printed form, he hands it to one of the attendants at the central desk. By him it is passed to another attendant, whose task it is to search out and bring in the works called for. They are laid on the central desks, and are carried by still another corps of employés to the reader's desk, which has been designated on the printed ticket. I may as well describe this printed ticket. On one side are the regulations—that the reader must not ask for more than one work on the same ticket; that the heading of the work wanted must be transcribed from the catalogues, with as much of the title as is necessary to its identification; that the form must be filled in a plain, clear hand; and that before the reader leaves the room he must return each book or set of books to an attendant, when he will obtain the corresponding ticket (which he has sent in for the books, and which is retained at the desk), the reader being responsible for the books as long as the ticket remains uncanceled. They are canceled with a blue lead-pencil, and returned on receipt of the books. The reader is further admonished that he must on no account take a book or manuscript out of the reading-room; and further, that permission to use the reading-room will be withdrawn from any person who writes or makes marks on any part of a printed book or manuscript. On the other side of the printed ticket is the blank form, which must be filled by stating the press mark, heading, and title of the work wanted, place and date of its publication, its size (whether 8vo, or 12mo, or what), the date, signature, and number of desk. I may add that the reader may choose any desk which he may find vacant; and that the rows of desks are designated by letters, A, B, C, etc., while each desk is numbered 1, 2, 3, etc.; and the desk is identified, say, as D 3, or G 6, which enables the attendant to find it without difficulty.

The process is, then, simply this: the reader first selects his desk, and notes its number, and the letter designating its row. He then goes to the catalogues, which are in manuscript, and constantly added to, and as he finds the books that he wishes to consult, fills up for each work (no matter how many its volumes) one of the printed forms. He may thus order as many books as he chooses. He hands the forms in, returns to his desk, and waits. It usually takes about half an hour before the books are laid before him. Meanwhile he may, if he chooses, wander

along the shelves in the circular room, take down any he pleases, consult them, or carry them to his desk to read. This is a precious privilege, for here are ranged, in methodical divisions, most of the standard works on the various branches of learning, as well as the reviews, monthlies, and weeklies, dictionaries of all languages, biographical works, encyclopedias, Parliamentary records, topographical works, and fictions. A chart of the room is found on the catalogue counters. This shows in sections, and between the radiating rows of desks, the various divisions of the shelves. For instance, the shelves between row A and row B might be historical works, between B and C philosophical, between C and D fiction, and so on; so that a glance at the chart, and then at the letters marked at the head of each row of desks, shows at once where any particular class of works may be found. It is hard to imagine a more simple or more perfect system.

The total number of volumes in the reading-room and the adjacent apartments (including the room of typographical curiosities and antiquities, where one sees the famous autographs—the Magna Charta, Shakspeare's signature, and so on) is nearly, if not quite, three-quarters of a million. This enormous figure does not include the almost countless tracts, pamphlets, manuscripts, and newspaper files. In one year 11,000 volumes and 27,000 parts of volumes were added to this great estate of learning; while counting every acquisition, pamphlet as well as volume, the total reached 163,000! The number of volumes in the great "dome room" alone is about 80,000. Many of these are, however, inaccessible to the direct procurement of the reader, being in upper tiers reached by light iron staircases and galleries only used by the attendants. Of the volumes within the reach, and accessible to the free use, of the reader there are some 20,000. The structure of the book-cases is, to one interested in interior architecture, one of the most curious of the many marvels of the Museum. They are very simply built, the uprights being formed of malleable iron, galvanized and framed together, having beechen wood fillets inserted between the iron to receive the brass pins on which the shelves rest. The frame-work sustains the iron perforated floors of the light galleries, a part of which is a clear space between the back of the shelves and the flooring, by which the light of the rear sky-lights is thrown down the backs of the books on each tier, so that the lettering may be distinct through the book ranges. The shelves themselves are of galvanized plate, edged with wainscot, covered with russet-colored leather, and having attached a "book-fall." Wadded pads are set at either end of the shelves to prevent injury to the binding when the books are taken out or restored to their places.



Except in the case of the external walls, the book-cases are double, the books being placed on both sides, and an iron-work lattice fixed for their separation longitudinally. A curious statistician has discovered that the edifice contains three lineal miles of book-cases eight feet high, and twenty-five miles of shelves; and descending to a still minuter detail, calculated that the leaves of the volumes therein, placed edge to edge, would extend 25,000 miles, or more than thrice the globe's diameter.

The decoration of this great reading-room has been well cared for, and is throughout characteristic of that sort of substantial and solid elegance in which the English delight, and which is an "English trait." The superb interior dome—the architectural marvel of the place—is relieved by light colors, and adorned with pure and tasteful gilding; this gives a cheerful tinge to the whole vast apartment. The concave of the dome is divided into twenty broad stripes by moulded ribs, gilded with unalloyed gold-leaf, the edges fringed with a leaf-pattern scalloped edge. Each stripe, or section, has a circular-headed window, with three panels above (the central medallion-shaped), bordered with gilt mouldings, the field of the panels being sky-blue, and the margins a deep cream-color. The central medallion at the top has the royal monogram, alternated with the imperial crown. The lower cornice is massive and gilded; and the compartments of the dome, the ribs and bases, the book-cases and galleries, the panels and railings, are all richly adorned with cheerful colors, the purest gilding, and elaborate (but not gingerbread) ornamentation.

Thus is this splendid boon, given to the nation by the nation, surrounded by every accessory to render its use easy and practicable, its occupancy cheerful and comfortable, and its sphere harmonious with the purpose for which it exists. That it is appreciated, one only needs to look through the glass door and observe the human busy bees sucking in the sweets which they find in books. In the course of a year between seventy-five and one hundred thousand persons make use of the reading-room. An average day's attendance comprises some two hundred persons. The utmost order, decorum, and quiet method prevail. One of the superior officers of the library has the general supervision over the reading-room, who is always to be found at the superintendent's desk in the centre of the hall. To him is confided not only the general task of overseeing that the attendants perform their duty with order and celerity, and preserving the decorum of the room—he also is charged with the special duty of assisting the readers in their researches.

The rules of admission as a reader to the reading-room are broad and liberal, and in-

terpose no obstacle to any student, however humble and obscure, who honestly desires to use its privileges. Those privileges are quite as accessible to foreigners as to Londoners.

The reading-room is open on every weekday except certain church holidays, and the first weeks in January, May, and September (for putting in order and repairs), from nine till four in the winter, five in fall and spring, and six in summer.

With all the English conservatism and hesitation in establishing *popular* institutions, and love of restricting and hedging about with conditions and qualifications great public privileges, no city of our republic can show a more substantial or more liberally managed public benefit than this reading-room. The reality of its freedom, its order, and its entire adaptability to answer its purpose, impress one. Here is one place where, without fee or favor, the humble student and the foreign scholar may partake of, and luxuriate in, the wealth of England; may participate in the marvelous range of lore, in every tongue, of every art and science, which her wealth, nobly bestowed, has collected. I can think of no happier destiny for the ardent lover of books, for a historian, a man of science, a statistician, a novelist, or a mere student absorptive but not fruitful, than to have cozy lodgings in the vicinity of Russell Square, a satisfactory English landlady, and a ticket—daily used—to the reading-room. He may sit in one of the roomy fauteuils as luxuriously as the West End lord in his velvet-lined mahogany, and may look round with a sense of ownership (for their use and fruits are freely his) upon a far prouder possession of learning than the greatest West End lord can boast. He is in goodly company; for here burrow, almost invariably, the scholars, romancers, philosophers of England. He sits, coequal in his privileges, with the British aristocracy of brain. He is served as faithfully and as quickly as is the minister of state by his favorite private secretaries. There is the whole day long to revel, uninterrupted if he will, in his beloved studies, in a tranquil and studious sphere, out of hearing of the bustle of the streets, though here is busiest London roaring all about him. If he grows weary for the while of his books and the quiet, he may walk out and wander through those seemingly endless corridors where are literally crowded the antiquities of Egypt and of Phœnicia, of Antioch and Afghanistan, of Athens and Rome; where are collected the marvels of geology and of mechanical science, of biology and the arts, ancient, medieval, and modern. He may read up his subject in the reading-room, and stepping into a neighboring corridor, find it practically illustrated in the glass cases which surround him.