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*** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK ON THE SUPPLY OF PRINTED BOOKS FROM THE LIBRARY TO THE READING ROOM OF THE BRITISH MUSEUM ***

ON THE SUPPLY OF PRINTED BOOKS FROM THE LIBRARY TO THE READING ROOM OF THE BRITISH MUSEUM

"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 have no right to complain. The fault is *theirs*, if mistakes and delay arise; and it is as absurd as unjust to impute the effect of their own ignorance or carelessness to the Officers of the Museum."

SIR NICHOLAS HARRIS NICOLAS.

M D CCC XLVI.

THE publication of the annexed correspondence has been determined upon not for the pleasure of exposing the mistakes and inconsistencies of Sir Nicholas Harris Nicolas, but for the purpose of drawing the attention of those who take an interest in the collection of Printed Books in the British Museum to a most important part of its management, *viz.* the supply of books to readers. In order to make the correspondence intelligible, it will be necessary to explain not only the circumstances which gave rise to it, but also the system of arrangement adopted to secure a regular attendance upon the readers from the Library, as well as the reasons why this system has been suggested; and it is hoped that, when the whole system is carefully examined, it will not be found undeserving of that support, without which it is impossible that any scheme can be carried out.

At the risk of entering into minute and very uninteresting particulars, well known to those who are conversant with the arrangements of a large Library, it is requisite to state that the books in that of the British Museum 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. The Title of a work marked in the Catalogue with, for instance, 500 *a*, means that the work itself is in the press which is numbered 500, and on the shelf of that press which is distinguished by letter *a*; if the mark be 500 *a* 2, the meaning is that the work occupies the second place on that shelf; and if marked 500 ^a/₆ 2, that it is the sixth article in the 2nd vol. on shelf *a* of press 500. A book being

wanted, the shortest way by far is generally found to be (and in the greatest number of cases it is the only one) to search the Catalogue, find the Press-mark, and look for the book accordingly. In 1836, at my suggestion, an alteration in the then prevailing system was adopted, which the Committee of the House of Commons on the British Museum, then sitting, considered an improvement, and so it was universally pronounced to be. The question put to me on the subject by Lord Stanley, as well as my answer, are here inserted. [Pg 4]

"Will you state what improvement has been recently adopted in the New Transcript [of the Catalogue] with regard to reference?"

"In the Catalogue of the British Museum, the one which we keep for the use of the Library, there are certain references given, or symbols, to know exactly where to find a book. In the Reading Room Catalogue those symbols were not put; I thought, and Mr. Baber thought also, that it would be an evident improvement to have in the Catalogue for the Reading Room, the same references as in the Catalogue of the Library, because the reader would have only to copy the title of the book as well as the reference, and instead of his ticket going to one of our men, who is obliged to look over the Catalogue inside to put the reference, the attendant would go direct with that ticket to the place where the book is, and carry it to the Reading Room immediately. It would be an economy of time for the readers, consequently an economy of time for our men, and consequently a saving of expense in the number of men. But there are other advantages attending this system. Often the readers come to ask for a book which was never printed, or which, if printed, is not in the Library or they write down the title as they have seen it elsewhere, not correctly quoted, and give it to one of the attendants. The attendant begins to look over all the Catalogues, and cannot find the book; he is afraid of being in the wrong; he loses a great deal of time, and the consequence is, that all the readers who have written correct tickets are kept waiting, by the fault of him who has written an incorrect one. 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 ensuring attention. By this means we shall save much time, and remove much of the inconvenience now complained of by the readers." [Pg 5]

It was found, however, that some readers, who neglected to comply with these rules, hindered the ready supply of books to those who did comply with them; and when, in 1837, I succeeded Mr. Baber as Keeper of the Printed Books Department, I thought of suggesting printed tickets or formulæ, according to which books were to be asked for by merely filling them up. The following is an exact specimen of these tickets:

Press Mark.	Title of the Work wanted.	Size.	Place.	Date.
(Date)		_____ (Signature).		

Please to restore each volume of the Catalogue to its place, as soon as done with.

On the reverse it is as follows:

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.
4. Before leaving the Room, 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 UNCANCELLED.

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Can any one say that to request readers to fill up such a form *correctly*, and to comply with these rules, is giving unnecessary trouble? My suggestion was approved of by Sir H. Ellis,—under whose especial control the management of the Reading Room is placed,—and who, moreover, proposed that the same system should be adopted for MSS.; which was done accordingly with the concurrence of Sir F. Madden, and the sanction of the Trustees. It has continued in operation ever since for both departments; but no attack has been made upon any one but myself for this scheme. The improvement was all but unanimously acknowledged to be very great; and no one rendered more justice to its merits, to the motives which led to its adoption, and to its beneficial results than Sir N. Harris Nicolas, who, having heard that a reader had expressed some dissatisfaction, addressed to me the following letter:

"Torrington Square, 20th October, 1837.

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"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 procuring 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 shew 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 dependant 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 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.

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"Believe me, with great esteem, my dear Sir, very sincerely yours, &c."

This letter stated almost all that could be said in favour of the plan: it seemed to express opinions maturely considered; I was therefore unprepared to hear condemned, as unnecessary and vexatious, (*See No. X.*) what had been pronounced by the same writer, as not only not vexatious, but absolutely necessary. The plea, that "he usually writes and speaks from the impression of the moment," may as easily be alleged in defence of his present as of his former judgment, and lead people to trust neither. 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 misspells 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

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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 handwriting, 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.

The *justice* of the complaint which gave rise to the following correspondence, will have been rendered more intelligible by this preliminary information. The facts are as follows:—

On the 18th of May, Sir N. H. Nicolas asked for five works at once. Four out of five of these works were brought to him within half an hour, as he himself states; and on the supposition, that he, in his first letter, had complained of delay, I, in answer, (No. II.) expressed my regret at the occurrence. In letter No. III. Sir Nicholas says, "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." I quote this passage as it affords the most conclusive proof of the *despatch* in obtaining books in the Reading Rooms of the British Museum, and of the unreasonableness of such readers as Sir N. H. Nicolas. 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. I expressed a regret, for which there was no occasion, for peace sake, and because the moment I got Sir N. H. Nicolas's first letter, I suspected, that, an article against the Museum Library in the *Spectator* of the day before being his, his letter was only a peg for a *querelle d'Allemand*, which I should have been most glad to avoid. With these feelings I wrote letter No. II.

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There are in the old printed and "useful" catalogue, from which Sir N. H. Nicolas took what he wrote on his ticket, three distinct works by the same author, the entries of which are as follows:—

	<p>BURCHETT (JOSIAH) Memoirs of Transactions at Sea during the War with France; beginning in 1688, and ending 1697. 8° Lond. 1703.</p>	
<p>806 b ————— ————— 2</p>	<p>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.</p>	
<p>581 i —————</p>	<p>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.</p>	

It appears from Sir N. H. Nicolas's first letter, that the work he wanted was the last; and had he given a ticket somewhat as follows, there is no doubt he would have got the book in five minutes:

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Press Mark.	Title of the Work wanted.	Size.	Place.	Date.
581 i	<i>Burchett (Josiah) A complete history of the most remarkable transactions at Sea, &c.</i>	fol.	Lond.	1720.

(Date) May 18th, 1846. N. Harris Nicolas. (Signature)

Please to restore each volume of the Catalogue to its place, as soon as done with.

Instead of this, he gave a ticket, of which the following is a *fac-simile*:—

Press Mark.	Title of the Work wanted.	Size.	Place.	Date.
581 ⁱ	Burchett's History of Transactions at Sea	8.	fvr	1704
(Date) 10 May 45	A. Davis (Signature)			

Please to restore each volume of the Catalogue to its place, as soon as done with.

Now the attention of those who take an interest in this matter is particularly requested to the following details, every one of them trifling indeed, and yet all springing from the ticket which was given, and more than enough to show the consequences which followed from the carelessness of its writer:—

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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. In justice to the other readers, as well as to the department, the ticket ought to have been at once returned to Sir N. H. Nicolas, marked "wrong," in order that he might have corrected his own mistakes. If a reader's mistakes are to be corrected by the attendants, all the evils arising from the old system, as described in my evidence before the House of Commons, are increased; for in addition to the loss of time in finding what a reader wants, there is the previous and additional loss caused by the error of the applicant, in directing an attendant to look for a work where it could not be. This loss of time proves injurious chiefly to the other readers; and it is "for their own comfort" that readers are requested to comply with the rules, without causing an attendant to waste the public time to discover what an individual applicant may want, which no one can know so well as the applicant himself.

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 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 enquiries, 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.

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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? The only reader who had a right to complain, *but who did not*, although he considered the delay *unusual*, was Mr. Fairholt, who wanted to look at a work merely to correct a proof sheet which he had brought with him, and who had asked for it very correctly, but who could not obtain it for more than half an hour, whilst the time of six persons was more or less wasted on Sir N. Harris Nicolas, who complains of the attendant, after not only a good explanation but a respectful apology, and who, moreover, ventures to assert in his Correspondence (See Letter No. X) that I justify the attendant "in refusing the book," whereas nothing can be clearer than that the attendants, one and all, far from refusing any book, did all they could, and more than they were bound, to find it, and that Sir Nicholas was fully aware of this, when he wrote that letter.

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If any one among those who act under my direction, fails in his duty, I never shall hesitate in taking proper notice of it; but I will never allow any of them, whatever be his station, to be unjustly accused without defending him. When I answered Sir N. Harris Nicolas's first letter, I very briefly stated only such facts as proved the injustice of his accusation, without giving any opinion whatever: the reasons for my moderation have been given. This moderation did not avail me much. Sir N. H. Nicolas was not only dissatisfied with my letter, but, in his reply, (No. III.) he shifted his ground, and complained of "the difficulties and delay arising from the present regulations, and the state of the Catalogues." 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. As he talked of the attention of the Trustees being called to this subject, I begged of him (No. IV. and V.) to prove what he had asserted—the truth of the habitual delay, and its cause. He declined the offer (which a man, convinced of the veracity of his statements, would have willingly accepted) and wrote in a much lower tone. (No. VI.) I again called on him to specify his charges, (No. VII.) and told him that his unfavourable opinions must be "of a *recent* date." He denied this, carefully avoiding entering into any particulars, but went on with generalities, (No. VIII.) except as to "Press-marks, &c." which he declared to be the source of delay. In answer to this *recent* accusation, I employed the very arguments and words which he himself had long before used in praise of this very system and arrangement. (No. IX.) His own words and arguments made him still more dissatisfied, and he vehemently condemned them. (No. X.) Upon which I sent him, enclosed in No. XI. a copy of his own letter of the 20th of October, 1837; and, as he had been taunting me with what he had printed and meant to print against me, I called on him to print along with it this letter. This he declined to do, (No. XII.) though, in the *Spectator* of the 30th of May, he continued his attacks—not without some awkwardness, however, now that he knew the proof I had of what he had so indignantly denied, the *recent* date of his unfavourable opinions.

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In the course of the Correspondence, Sir N. H. Nicolas endeavoured to drag me into a controversy about Catalogues, and a variety of other points connected with the Library. I did not feel disposed to enter into a profitless discussion with such an adversary. 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.

A. PANIZZI.

BRITISH MUSEUM,
June 5th, 1846.

CORRESPONDENCE
BETWEEN SIR NICHOLAS H. NICOLAS
AND MR. PANIZZI.

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No. I. *Sir N. H. Nicolas to Mr. Panizzi.*

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 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.

No. II. *Mr. Panizzi to Sir N. H. Nicolas.*

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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 8vo. the place as "fvr," which, may be, is meant for London, and the date 1704. There is in the catalogue a work of Burchett different from the one you wanted, and immediately preceding it, "8vo. 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, &c.

No. III. *Sir N. H. Nicolas to Mr. Panizzi.*

Torrington Square, 19th 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.

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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 think fit to 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, &c.

No. IV. *Mr. Panizzi to Sir N. H. Nicolas.*

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, &c.

No. V. *The same to the same.*

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May 22nd, 1846.

MY DEAR SIR,

THE Trustees meet to-morrow (Saturday, May 23rd) 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, &c.

No. VI. *Sir N. H. Nicolas to Mr. Panizzi.*

Torrington Square, May 22nd, 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, &c.

No. VII. *Mr. Panizzi to Sir N. H. Nicolas.*

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 state of the catalogues, in obtaining printed books."

[Pg 22]

These are certainly charges, and I naturally expected 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 intentions; 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, &c.

No. VIII. *Sir N. H. Nicolas to Mr. Panizzi.*

Torrington Square, 24 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 my 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 much, of what seems to be improper in your Department.

[Pg 23]

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 weeks 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, &c.

No. IX. *Mr. Panizzi to Sir N. H. 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.

[Pg 24]

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 despatch in procuring books. This can only be secured by *perspicuity* in 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."^[A]

[Pg 25]

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 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, &c.

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 every body 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,

1. 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.
2. 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.

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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-mark." 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.^[B]

You say the fault in these cases is the applicant's, for not complying with all your regulations; and you coolly talk of their 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."

[Pg 27]

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 anything 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, &c.

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.

May 27th, 1846.

SIR,

I AM surprised to find that the expressions which displease you most in my letter of the 26th instant, are those which I transcribed *verbatim* from one which you volunteered to write to me in 1837,^[C] 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, &c.

No. XII. *Sir N. H. Nicolas to Mr. Panizzi.*

Torrington Square, 26 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 of 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 expect occasionally, 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 appeared to justify the apparent cause. It was better to give ten minutes to the Catalogue, than to wait three, not to say six 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; but I have no respect for mulish obstinacy, or bigotted self sufficiency.

[Pg 29]

You may be sure that if a convenient opportunity be afforded me for printing my letter to you of 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, &c.

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

N. H. N.

LONDON: PRINTED BY CHARLES WHITTINGHAM,
TOOKS COURT, 1846.

[Pg 30]

FOOTNOTES:

- [A] The passages marked with inverted commas in praise of what Sir N. H. Nicolas now condemns, are, *mutatis mutandis*, from his own letter of the 20th of October, 1837, inserted above, p. 5. They were not so marked in my original letter of the 25th of May. Sir Nicholas complains of this in the following words: "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." 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. Does he mean to avow at last, that he has ventured to attack me *recently*, because he had forgotten, *not* his former opinions, (opinions so strongly entertained are *not* forgotten) but his having expressed them?

A. P.

[B] It seems—from the impression which others have of this occurrence which I have totally forgotten,—that Sir N. H. Nicolas could not obtain the Index, because it was not entered in the Catalogue; whence I concluded that it was not in the Library. If all this be true, it only proves *an error in the Catalogue*; but it has nothing to do with the working of the system, as Sir N. H. Nicolas must know as well as I do.

A. P.

[C] This letter has been inserted above, [page 7](#).

TRANSCRIBER'S NOTES:

Inconsistencies in spelling and hyphenation have been retained from the original.

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