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Bodleian printed books and manuscripts, by Henry W. Chandler**

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*** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK FURTHER REMARKS ON THE POLICY OF
LENDING BODLEIAN PRINTED BOOKS AND MANUSCRIPTS ***

FURTHER REMARKS
ON THE
POLICY OF LENDING
BODLEIAN
PRINTED BOOKS AND MANUSCRIPTS.
BY
HENRY W. CHANDLER, M.A.
FELLOW OF PEMBROKE COLLEGE, OXFORD;
WAYNFLETH PROFESSOR OF MORAL AND METAPHYSICAL PHILOSOPHY,
AND A CURATOR OF THE BODLEIAN LIBRARY.

Oxford:
B. H. BLACKWELL,
50 AND 51, BROAD STREET.
1887.
—
Price Sixpence.

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Further Remarks on the Policy of Lending Bodleian printed Books and Manuscripts.

[3]

There are several reasons why it is in the highest degree improbable that I should take any part in the debate on the Bodleian Statute, but I reserve the right to handle in my own fashion any arguments that may be used, and to supplement, if need be, any facts or supposed facts that may be brought forward during the discussion.

Those who are in favour of changing the whole character of the Bodleian, and who wish to convert it from a library of reference into a library of circulation, do not seem to feel much confidence in the strength of their case; at all events, they have made no serious attempt to meet the facts and arguments with which they are confronted, but show a disposition to wander off into side issues of little or no importance. Before examining the letters of Mr. Sanday, Mr. Ellis, and Dr. Rost (as far as I know the only advocates of lending that have yet ventured into print), it may be well to add some further evidence on the lending system, which was omitted from the 'Remarks' by inadvertence. The Advocates' Library is, as we all know, a lending library, and in 1852, or thereabouts, the librarian informed Dr. Bandinel that they had already *lost* nearly *seven thousand* works. In 1849 Mr. Maitland told a Committee of the House of Commons that 'all the ordinary readable books, for which there is a great demand, are now reduced into a state and condition so bad that it is perfectly disgraceful'; and he was of opinion that 'the only satisfactory and practical reform in the Advocates' Library would be to put an end to the circulation of the books.' Mr. Panizzi—a splendid librarian and a man with a head on his shoulders—addressed a string of queries to thirty-six large continental libraries, and asked, *inter alia*, whether they lent their books, whether those books were in consequence lost or damaged, whether the practice was complained of, and whether readers were inconvenienced by it. Six libraries out of the thirty-six never lent under any circumstances whatever; thirteen returned either no answer or no clear answer as to the consequences of the practice; *three* (the Public Library at Basle, the University Library at Turin, and St. Mark's, Venice) reported 'no inconvenience as resulting'; but the remaining *fourteen* told a very different tale—from the Royal Library, Berlin, 'few books were lost,' but books were damaged; at the City Library, Berne, 'books do certainly suffer,' and readers are inconvenienced; at the Royal Library, Copenhagen, 'many inconveniences are the consequences of such a practice'; 'books are lost, &c.'—a very eloquent '&c.' especially if it be compared with the evidence of Molbech the librarian there, see 'Remarks,' p. 59; at the City Library, Frankfurt, 'books are not entirely lost, but are often damaged'; at the Public Library, Geneva, 'books are lost and damaged'; at the Brera, Milan, 'generally speaking books are not injured,' but readers are inconvenienced; at the National Library, Paris, it is hoped that rules have been adopted which would 'prevent the great losses and just complaints of the public.' (I may parenthetically observe that forty years ago or more the losses of this one library were estimated at *fifty thousand volumes*); at St. Geneviève, 'the principle is acknowledged to be liable to many abuses'; at the Mazarene Library, 'the system is found very dangerous'; at the Library of the Institute, the practice was condemned as 'highly pernicious and practically liable to the abuses implied in the question'; at the Ducal Library, Parma, books are not lost and 'few slightly damaged,' but readers complain of inconvenience; at the Imperial Library, Prague, 'readers were inconvenienced'; and at Wolfenbüttel, 'all the inconveniences mentioned in the question are the consequence of the system'; that is to say, books were lost and damaged, and readers were inconvenienced.

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I have said that the answer returned from St. Mark's, Venice (where lending on a very small scale prevailed), was that no inconvenience was felt, but it is well deserving of notice that the respondent continues thus, '*if librarians were asked all over the world, AND THEY WOULD CANDIDLY ANSWER THE QUESTION, one and all would deprecate the system of lending, being liable to every one of the abuses mentioned in the question.*' Unfortunately librarians, like other people, will not always answer questions candidly. There is plenty more evidence of this sort, but what has been already adduced here and in the 'Remarks' is surely enough to prove the mischief inseparable from this silly practice even to the most obtuse of mankind.

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Here too is a very significant fact, which ought to speak trumpet-tongued to the Bodleian Curators. In 1827 Mr. Kerrich, the Public Librarian at Cambridge, possessed an Arabic

Manuscript (a history of the Berbers), which was in the strictest sense of the word unique. In one sense all manuscripts are unique, for no two are or can be exactly alike, but Mr. Kerrich's book was the only known copy of the work in existence anywhere. He was strongly urged to give or sell it to the University Library over which he presided, but he utterly declined to do either the one or the other, because the Cambridge Library is a lending library. Few men, he said, know the value of manuscripts; and he declared that there were only two libraries in England where his book would be open to the use of scholars and at the same time safe, the British Museum and the Bodleian. This manuscript now reposes on our shelves, and we got it simply and solely because in 1827 (and for many years after) we still possessed common sense. Kerrich would never have let us have this unique volume, had he supposed it possible that we should ever have been so forgetful of our duty as to lend Bodleian books. We might learn something from the Persians, who, as I was informed the other day, on what seemed to be very good authority, have a saying which runs thus:—'The man who lends a book is a fool, but that man is a greater fool who returns a book that has been lent to him'—a fearful mixture of true with false doctrine.

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Now for the letters, and as Dr. Rost is a librarian he shall have precedence. His epistle will be found in the *Academy* (March 5, 1887), and it is a real contribution to the facts of the case. It is reducible to two statements:—

1. During nearly eighteen years there have been from the India Office 'thousands of loans' and 'there has not been a single loss to record.' In February, 1887, there were '337 Oriental MSS. out on loan, 47 of which are in the hands of scholars in India.'

2. 'Numerous editions of texts and other works based on our collections of MSS. would either have been impossible, or at least not possible, to their actual extent except for the existing arrangement.'

Here we have lending on a truly gigantic and imperial scale, 'thousands of loans' and 'not a single loss': nothing is said, however, about damage and deterioration, which must have been considerable. Still 'thousands of loans' and 'not a single loss' is a mighty strong fact, so strong indeed that Dr. Rost may be congratulated on a surprising run of luck. But his marvellous good fortune is no argument in favour of lending; it is rather an argument against it. A man has been known once in his life to throw double sixes four times running in a game of backgammon; no other player, however, who has seen this done need expect to do the like, for the chances against him, if we merely consider the single and simple chance, are more than a million and a half to one: (strictly 1,679,615 to 1.) Dr. Rost has lent MSS. thousands of times, and they have always come back safely, not perhaps quite as fresh and sound as they went out, still they *have* come back; let no other librarian expect that the fickle goddess will treat him with like favour. Consider for a moment the evidence produced above as to the experience of other lending libraries, and you will find it impossible to believe that the Bodleian can meet with luck so entirely exceptional as that which has befallen the India Office. It is so uncanny that, were I Secretary of State for India, I should certainly follow the example of Polycrates, and sacrifice something very valuable, only not a manuscript; the safest thing, however, would be to stop the hazardous practice of lending, and tempt Fate no more. The second part of Dr. Rost's letter merely re-echoes an argument used by Mr. Sanday and Mr. Ellis.

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Mr. Sanday's letter is printed in the *Oxford Magazine* of February 23, 1887. He sees 'two great, if not fatal, flaws' in my argument against lending out books. They are: 1. that I 'look only at one of the uses of a MS.,' and 2. that I 'immensely under-estimate the value of the work that has been done upon MSS. in recent years.' I plead an emphatic not-guilty to both these charges. On what evidence do they rest? As to the first, the evidence offered is that 'my idea of a MS. appears to be that it should exist beautifully, occasionally inspected by a *connoisseur* who strolls down to the library purely for his own amusement and with no further result worth speaking of.' Then I am told that a great number of manuscripts are 'valuable chiefly for their text,' and that when 'they have been collated and the collation thoroughly tested their work in the world is to a great extent done.' Very good: now let us dismiss as extraneous to the present question manuscripts which are 'works of art,' and calligraphic or palæographical specimens or curiosities, and then let me ask whence my kindly opponent derives his information as to 'my idea of a MS.?' I am curious to know, because he certainly cannot have got it out of my 'Remarks'; he must have other sources of information, only, I can assure him, that he has been most woefully misled: in short, his notion of 'my idea' is wholly fictitious. That a great number of manuscripts are 'valuable chiefly for their text' is a proposition so self-evidently true, that it might have been thought difficult to find any one out of a lunatic asylum who ever doubted it. Will Mr. Sanday point out to me in anything I have ever written any passage which, by any interpretation however forced, could be made to say that the great proportion of manuscripts are valuable for much except their texts? In the greatest libraries—even in the Bodleian—the number of splendid manuscripts—of manuscripts valuable as works of art or as palæographic monuments—is comparatively small.

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But let us suppose the fiction to be a fact; let it be assumed that 'my idea of a MS. is that it should exist beautifully'; how would that be a flaw in the argument against lending Bodleian books? The argument—to put it in its baldest form—is, that Nothing that tends to damage a library ought to be done by those who really care for it; but lending tends to damage a library, *ergo. Minor probatur*: Whatever unnecessarily damages the books tends to damage a library; lending does so, *ergo*. Again, Whatever deters would-be benefactors from giving books tends to damage a library; lending does so; *ergo*, and so on and so on. The 'Remarks' can be run out into mood and figure with no trouble at all. How is this argument or any part of it vitiated, if I were to say (what I never have said), that 'a MS. should exist beautifully'? Let us clench the absurdity: suppose I had been fool enough to say that no book should ever be looked at in the library for

more than an hour a day; even that would not vitiate the argument against lending books out of it. Have we forgotten in this once famous University what a contradictory proposition is? Have we as completely lost the art of clear disputation as we have forgotten the use of the rapier? There are times when I think so.

Come we now to the second flaw: I 'immensely under-estimate the value of the work that has been done upon MSS. in recent years'. Suppose for a moment that I do, how does that constitute a flaw in my argument? It beats me altogether: I cannot see it. Do not lend your books, says the argument, for five or six different reasons; and I ask again with positive wonder in what way any of these reasons are contradicted, even if I do under-estimate the work that has been done on MSS.? What has the one thing to do with the other? I could understand it if it were impossible to examine a MS. *in* the library; but that cannot be Mr. Sanday's meaning. Or does he mean this? If you do not let your MSS. go out of the Library, and occasionally out of the country, they will not be examined or collated at all? I hope that this is not his meaning; for badly as I think of the state of learning here, I have never thought so badly of it as this supposition would imply. If after thirty years of constant 'reform' we are sunk so low that we neither can, nor will, use the treasures of the Bodleian Library ourselves, why in that case I say let us give the whole of it away to some country where scholars are yet to be found. A library in which no man works—a library such as the Bodleian is in the hands of men too ignorant or too idle to use it—is dreadful to think of. I, however, hoped better of the place, and I argued that we should not send our books out of the library, because—as one reason amongst others—it would then be impossible for us to use those books in the library. I wished to think of this University as still living, and of its members as still lovers of learning for its own sake, though I admit that this last effort cost me almost all the faith I possess.

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But I trust that I have completely misunderstood the way in which my good-tempered critic would connect my under-estimate of the work done on MSS. with the argument against lending. All this, be it observed, is on the supposition that I actually have under-estimated that work; this I do not admit to be the fact, but whether I have or have not it in no way affects the argument against lending.

Mr. Sanday's next point is, that if we do not lend our books to foreigners, foreigners will not lend their books to us, which will greatly inconvenience English scholars; and, lastly, that it is a great inconvenience not to be permitted to have Bodleian printed books in our rooms. 'The purpose,' he says, 'with which one borrows books is mainly to *complete a collection*: one has, perhaps, ten or twelve of the books one wants, but just some two or three are needed which no other library but the Bodleian can supply'. What does all this amount to? Why, that it is a great convenience to have books and MSS. out of the Bodleian. *Quis negavit?* Everybody admits it; but the point—and it is really astonishing how few people there seem to be now-a-days who can see the point of any thing—the point is this: which on the whole is the greater convenience to the greatest number of serious students, letting books go out of the library or keeping them in it? Never to lend entails inconveniences; lending also entails inconveniences; on which side does the balance of inconvenience lie? People feel, as Mr. Sanday confesses that he feels, how convenient it is '*to complete a collection*'; they never for one moment consider that their convenience is another man's inconvenience. Provided they can get what they want, they really seem to care not one farthing for anybody else in the universe. It is almost needless to add that this remark does not apply to Mr. Sanday.

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If we did not send our books abroad, it is certain that foreign libraries might, and, if they were wise, would, decline to lend us their books. And a very good thing too. It benefits us to visit foreign libraries, and it will benefit foreigners to visit ours. In these days of rapid and cheap locomotion, there is less reason than ever for sending books racing about all over the world. If you go to Simancas, to Venice, or to the Public Record Office, you may consult and copy the records of Spain, of Venice, and of England, for yourself. If you had rather not go, you can get attested copies of any document which you desire to have, but you cannot borrow. And it should be the same with all great libraries. If a man wishes for a partial or a complete collation of a Bodleian book, or for a complete transcript, he most certainly ought to be able to get it accurately done, and I should hope that in this University he would get it done gratis, though it would be no hardship or injustice if such work were charged for at a modest rate. If a man unable to visit us is willing to pay for a transcript or collation, and there is no one here either able or willing to make it, then there is a substantial grievance; but in no seat of learning ought such a thing to be possible. In any University that deserves the name, and especially in a University so richly endowed as ours is, there ought to be, and if funds were not wasted there might be, a number of keen-eyed men skilled in every ordinary language of Europe and of Asia, able and willing for the mere love of learning to do this sort of work thoroughly well. It should be the same in London. It is shameful to us as Englishmen, considering what our Eastern Empire is, that there should be the least difficulty in getting any MS. properly transcribed or properly collated either here or at the India Office. Let us reform ourselves in very deed, and not in name only, as quickly as may be. Although a University does not mean a place where the *omne scibile* is either known or taught, it is certain that such a University as Oxford pretends to be (and might have been) ought to contain even amongst its College fellows men skilled in all but the most outlandish tongues.

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Mr. Ellis' letter appeared in the *Academy* of February 26, 1887. It consists of two parts more or less intertwined, that is to say, of objections to opinions which he believes me to hold though I do not, and of an attempt to justify the lending out of books. The personal part (I do not mean this in any disagreeable sense) has been answered, so far as it required an answer, in the *Academy* of

March 5, 1887, and need not be repeated here.

Mr. Ellis thinks that the tone of my pamphlet 'is, to say the very least, reactionary', and he describes me as the exponent of 'a reactionary movement against the study and use of MSS.' The pamphlet says in effect that the Curators have for years past been doing a wrong thing, and a thing for which they had no statutable warrant; it gives reasons why the thing is both wrong and foolish, and it begs the University to put a stop to the wrong doing. This Mr. Ellis calls 'reactionary'; a violent misuse of an adjective, as it seems to me. Then he makes out entirely to his own satisfaction, though hardly, it is to be thought, to that of his readers, that I object to the presence of an undergraduate in the Bodleian. Anybody who reads the 'Remarks' with ordinary attention will see that in the passage where alone the word occurs (p. 46) it is used to denote a species of the unlearned, and surely no one will deny that it is rightly so used; for not one undergraduate in five hundred could be properly described as learned. But if any undergraduate is learned, I have never objected to his presence in the library. How could I object when I have said more than once that the Bodleian was founded and endowed by learned men for learned men? Not a year ago I introduced to the library a very young Cambridge man, whom I firmly believed to be an undergraduate; and I congratulated myself on having turned loose into that glorious place exactly the sort of person that Bodley, Laud, and Selden would have welcomed, for he was at once a scholar and a lover of books. It turned out that my young friend was not an undergraduate at all, but a recently made Bachelor of Arts; but that makes no difference as far as I am concerned; I believed him to be an undergraduate when I offered to be his sponsor. So much for the charge that I would exclude undergraduates from the Bodleian. I would exclude (just as Bodley ordered) all unlearned people, and therefore almost all undergraduates; I would welcome all learned men (and women too), and therefore any one, graduate or undergraduate, who is learned; nor should I take 'learned' in a very strict sense.

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Mr. Ellis declares that he should regard the change of practice which I advocate 'not only with grave distrust, but with a quite lively resentment, as an outrage and desecration' to the memory of the late Mr. Coxe. I understand this rather tall talk (and others do the same) to mean that Mr. Coxe approved of the practice of lending books and MSS. Now I have uncommonly good authority for saying that Mr. Coxe viewed the lending system with as much disfavour as I do myself. How could it have been otherwise? Mr. Coxe was a librarian who knew his business, and what the practice of such a library as the Bodleian should be. The Curators, the greater number of whom were profoundly ignorant both of books and of book management, coerced him; he was obliged to yield, but I am assured that he detested their barbarism quite as much as I do.

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The rest of the letter merely puts forward the plea of convenience over again, and, like the rest, the writer does not see that neither I nor anybody else have ever questioned the convenience of the practice. I find that some readers of Mr. Ellis' letter suppose the sentences in inverted commas to be all mine, but that is not the case; several of them are expressions which he supposes (wrongly enough) I should or might use. I have, for instance, nowhere objected to the nasty habit of biting your nails, though Mr. Ellis puts the objection into my mouth. So long as a man merely bites his own nails, I should say nothing, whatever I might think: it would of course be different, if he were to try to bite my nails.

Every Member of Convocation has a right to criticise the New Statute, and therefore no apology need be made for the following remarks. For the first time in the history of the Bodleian it is proposed plainly and clearly to invest the Curators with the power to lend books. From the foundation of the library down to 1873 they had no such power, no such right; nevertheless from 1862 they did as a matter of fact lend manuscripts and printed books. It was their custom, their '*mos*' to do so. On February 28, 1873, they resolved that they would '*proceed by statute to take power to order the lending out of books under certain restrictions.*' Now no sane man resolves to 'take power' to do what he already has a right to do. This resolution then was a distinct confession that for years past the Curators had been acting unstatutably, and it is probable, perhaps certain, that the words '*sicut mos fuit*' in the extraordinary statute of 1873 were intended to cover and condone the illegal acts of the previous ten or eleven years, an intention completely frustrated by the unparalleled bad Latin in which that Statute is expressed. Whether a permission 'to borrow books for learned men' conveys to the Curators the power to lend them is very doubtful indeed; if it were not so, it is difficult to see why the Curators applied for the Statute now before us. Were any one to maintain that the Curators have now no power to lend books, and that they never have had it since the Library was founded, he would not find much difficulty in proving his case to the satisfaction of all reasonable beings. The present Statute proposes to give them this power, though not in perfectly unobjectionable terms. For it first allows them to lend manuscripts, and then declares that no rare book shall be lent without the consent of Convocation. Now a manuscript is more than rare; it is unique, no two being exactly alike. There is an ambiguity here which will be found in practice to breed endless difficulties. Then, again, who is to judge of the antiquity, rarity, and so forth of any book, printed or manuscript? Either the Curators must decide these questions for themselves, or they must act on the judgment of the Librarian. Knowing what it now knows, is the University really prepared to say that the existing board shall decide such questions; and, if not, is it ready to leave matters so complex and difficult to the judgment of any one man, be he who he may?

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Lastly, the Librarian is permitted to lend books neither rare nor valuable, and it is left to him alone to decide whether a given book is or is not rare or valuable. To those ignorant of books it will seem easy enough to settle this question, though it is one to frighten a man who does know something about them. Nothing is stranger than the sudden way in which some books become at first scarce, and then totally disappear. For nearly forty years I have been on the look-out for two

English books which I read as a child; one a book of voyages and travels, the other a cheap edition of the Arabian Nights, and never once in all that time have I had a chance of buying either: they seem to have vanished. One would have said without hesitation that they were not rare and certainly not valuable, yet they are absolutely unprocurable. But this is a technical matter which will hardly interest Congregation. It is more to the point to insist that the rules for lending drawn up and approved by the Curators should be revised and approved by Convocation, and that without its consent they shall neither be altered nor abrogated. Even so it will be impossible to prevent frightful mischief. If the thoroughly bad principle of lending is affirmed, is it not clear that the Paris rule should be adopted? That rule is that *only duplicates of books neither rare nor valuable* (the exact words of the regulation are quoted in the 'Remarks,' p. 43) *shall be lent*.

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But it is to be hoped that the University will follow the excellent example of the British Museum. The Oriental Congress have been moving heaven and earth to get the Trustees to sanction the loan of Oriental Manuscripts 'under proper guarantees,' and they have brought considerable pressure to bear; but the Trustees, as well as the responsible officers in the Museum, have given the Oriental Congress its answer. The authorities in Great Russell Street know their business, and they utterly decline to lend on any terms. Let us be as wise as they are. If the present Statute is passed, no one can be so foolish as to suppose that it will be long obeyed, or that it will not be soon relaxed. The question really is between lending and not lending. The lending, if sanctioned in any form, will at first be limited, it will rapidly become unlimited. A rat-hole in a dyke lets the water in at first in a dribble, then in a stream, finally away goes the dyke and irreparable mischief is done. So will it be with lending, only that the dyke which defends the Bodleian will be bored in an indefinite number of places. Every borrower will act the part of a rat. The borrowers' list which this Statute legalizes for the first time will soon embrace the name of every graduate in Oxford. It is so convenient to have the exact book you want in your own room. Yes, unquestionably most convenient; but what is the price you pay for this convenience? A ruinous one; you destroy the Bodleian as a library of reference. 'Once or twice a year,' says Mr. Warren (see *Academy*, March 12, 1887), 'graduates like myself go up to Oxford on a short visit with pages of references to verify, anxious to see new or back numbers of the *Revue Celtique*, Palæographical Society publications, &c. It is both inconvenient and disappointing to be told, as I have been told more than once, that such-and-such a book is out on loan, and cannot be had. The inconvenience will become greater as the circle of privileged borrowers becomes larger'; this is the language of a student, and the language of common sense. The benefit of a reference library cannot be exaggerated, and it must be clear to the meanest capacity that lending and deposit cannot possibly be combined. It is not difficult to damage or destroy the usefulness of the Bodleian, and the Statute on which we are now to vote is the first step downwards. To lend books out of such a library as ours is an act opposed to the teachings of experience, nor can it be said that the course which we are invited to take is one sanctioned by those who are eminent authorities on such a question. The men who for years past have been persistently trying to force this fatal policy upon the University may be remarkable on more accounts than one; yet they are assuredly not remarkable either for their acquaintance with books and libraries, or for their knowledge of the Bodleian. To them it is merely a large library, not essentially different from the London Library or from Mudie's, and they propose to treat it accordingly. No mistake can be greater. The Bodleian is no ordinary library; it is one of the wonders of the world, and are we going to be such Vandals as to sanction a practice which can only end in its destruction?

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BAXTER, PRINTER, OXFORD.

Transcriber's Notes:

Punctuation and spelling inaccuracies were silently corrected.

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