



The Sufferings and Death of Books.

Do you love your books? Books have bodies as well as souls. Do you care for the material tabernacle which enshrines the spirits that warm and brighten your own? "Slaves of the lamp," they are ready at a moment's notice to come forth and transport you not only to foreign regions upon earth, but to mystic scenes in worlds unknown. They will build castles for you—in the air, and *Chateaux—en Espagne*; and will people them with figures that sometimes seem startlingly near, a descent from the canvas of the imagination on to the solid floor of tangibility. But the bodies of your books—how do you house them? Do you guard them from excessive cold and excessive heat? Do you save them from being poisoned by foul gases, and from consumption through exposure to damp, and from the vermin? Do you provide them with medicine and medical attendance in their diseases? Do you belong to the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Books? We are not aware that there is such a society; but that is a mere matter of detail. We feel disposed, like the Fat Boy, to "make your flesh creep" by counting some of the brutalities practised toward books.

Books have perished by fire on notable occasions, as in the case recorded in Acts, xix. 19, where the books destroyed are valued at fifty thousand pieces of silver. These were either treatises on magic, books of sorcery, or *Ephesia grammata*, little scrolls containing magic sentences and carried about as charms. The martyrdom of living flesh and sentient nerves runs through all the centuries alongside of the cremation of the books that enshrined the martyrs' doctrines. Tyndale translates the Bible; the Bishop of London buys up an impression and consigns it to the flames. With the proceeds Tyndale prints many more than were burned. "The blood of the martyrs is the seed of the Church;" and the smoke of the burning Scriptures was the printer's capital. Orthodox and heterodox were pretty evenly balanced in their fiery judgments on the enemies' books. Much rubbish has thus perished, but the coiling wreaths of smoke from the martyr-fire of a true book have always formed the letters *Resurgam*. Ignorance, as well as flaming orthodoxy, has incinerated many a precious book. One shudders to read of valuable black-letter volumes, "Caxtons" and others, being found in the baskets of Sally or Betty, the melancholy relics of hundreds that may have preceded them up the chimney of some parlor fire or kitchen grate. And one trembles to think how many absolutely priceless manuscripts may be—probably are—at this moment tumbling about amid dust and vermin in old monasteries and cellars and caves, not knowing whether their destiny be destruction, or an enthusiastic welcome in the British Museum or Bodleian, or some continental harbor of refuge.

Water has played quite as terrible a part as fire in the massacre of books. We are not thinking of the whole libraries that have been lost at sea—though it is true that cultured fishes have not lacked literary pabulum—but of the slow torture of books by damp. It is a relief to know that books do not suffer from rheumatism or neuralgia, though we have nightmare suspicions on the point. But they suffer decay in a symbolic parallelism to human lapses into disease and towards the tomb. The fibre of the paper and binding succumbs to the damp; and finally the maltreated book loses all its vitality and crumbles into powder at the touch. College libraries have been known in which the books have never been comforted with a fire, and where ivy and other tendrils have crawled in through broken panes in the neglected windows and made tracks for the

heavy dews, the condensed November fogs, the driving autumn rains; and the unhappy books have slowly rotted in their prison, in the company of fungi and slugs, like forgotten prisoners of some condemned faith in the oubliettes of stony-hearted ecclesiastics.

Collections of books subjected to modern conditions are afflicted by the same causes of disease to which many of our own maladies are due. Their health perishes under the fumes of gas. The sulphurous element in the midnight gas which, not to our advantage, has supplanted the midnight oil, destroys the elasticity and robustness of their binding and eats away their strength. Under the influence of the gaseous acids and the drying effects of heat, you will see the constitution of your poor books showing the inroads of disease and approach of death. And of course your top shelf goes first. It is not true that there is "nothing like leather." In point of the conditions of firm, robust health, your leather-covered books are very like children; they want a pure atmosphere, not too hot, nor too cold, nor too dry, nor too damp; and if your books are ailing, look after your children in the same room.

Dust and neglect have to bear the responsibility of much suffering on the part of our books. The custom of gilding the top edges of books is a useful palliative, but like all palliatives, it is not to be too much relied on. Nor are glass doors to bookcases so valuable as people suppose. The alterations of temperature create a constant in and out suction, and with the air goes the dust, and the dust partly consists of germs, always going up and down in the earth seeking what they may devour.

"Bookworms" are now almost exclusively known in the secondary and derivative meaning of the word as porers over dry books; but there was a time when the real worms were as ubiquitous as our cockroaches. They would start at the first or last page and tunnel circular holes through the volume, and were cursed by librarians as *bestia audax* and *pestes chartarum*. There were several kinds of these little plagues. One was a sort of death-watch, with dark brown, hard skin; another had a white body with little brown spots on its head. Those that had legs were the larvae of moths, and those without legs were grubs that turned to beetles. They were dignified, like other disagreeable things, with fine Latin names, which we spare our readers. All of them had strong jaws and very healthy appetites; but we are happy to find that their digestive powers, vigorous as they were, quail before the materials of our modern books. China clay, plaster of Paris, and other unwholesome ailments have conquered the *pestes chartarum*. They sigh and shrivel up. Good-bye, little wretches; we have worse than you to look after now; germs of fever, and cholera, and hydrophobia, to keep us busy, and we are staggered to discover what pitched battles are being fought in our veins every day by our brave little white corpuscles. Peace to the memory, for it is now hardly more than a memory, of the *bestia audax*.

The most audacious beast of our day is the cutter-out of plates. Where is the library that cannot show evidence of his ravages? Towards him we feel a ferocity that is merciless. We should like to extract a tooth without anæsthetics for every plate he has purloined. A giant of villany of this kind existed in the early part of last century. His awful robberies were bound up in about a hundred volumes, now in the British Museum. There is a feeble but still more irritating form of outrage upon books in public libraries, which consists in scrawling on the margins the vapid and frivolous criticisms or opinion of the reader, who

often unconsciously gives evidence that he is incapable of appreciating what he reads. We have a book before us now, the collected poems of the greatest poetess of our century, and there is hardly a page not disfigured by some trumpery cavil about the words, or the sense, or the rhythm. Through all her sweet thoughts, this *pestis chartarum* follows her, until we take up the poker and strike a blow at an imaginary skull too thick to break and too empty to be susceptible of concussion of the brain. We are growing hot, and will lay down the topic here, lest we need a cooling febrifuge.

From Chamber's Journal.

Reminiscences of American Hotels.

The American hotels are all alike. Some are worse.

Describe one and you have described them all.

On the ground floor, a large entrance hall strewn with cuspidors for the men, and a side entrance provided with an awning, a sort of triumphal arch, for the ladies. On this floor, the sexes are separated as at the public baths.

Between meals you will be supplied with ice-water *ad libitum*.

No privacy. No coffee-room, no smoking-room. No place where you can go and quietly sip a cup of coffee or drink a glass of beer with a cigar. You can have a drink at the bar, and then go and sit down in the hall among the crowd.

Life in an American hotel is an alternation of the cellular system during the night and of the gregarious system during the day; an alternation of the penitential systems carried out at Philadelphia and at Auburn.

It is not in the bedroom that you must seek anything to cheer you. The bed is generally good, but only for the night. The room is perfectly nude. Not even "Napoleon's Farewell to His Soldiers at Fontainebleau," as in France, or "Strafford Walking to the Scaffold," as in England. Not that these pictures are particularly cheerful; still they break the monotony of the wall-paper. Here the only oases in the brown or gray desert are cautions.

Another notice tells you what the proprietor's responsibilities are, and at what time the meals take place. Now this last notice is the most important of all. Woe to you if you forget it! For if you should present yourself one minute after the dining-room door is closed, no human consideration would get it open for you. Supplications, arguments, would be of no avail. Not even money.

"What do you mean?" some old-fashioned European will exclaim. "When the *table d'hôte* is over, of course you cannot expect the *menu* to be served to you; but surely you can order a steak or a chop."

No, you cannot; not even an omelette or a piece of cold meat. If you arrive at one minute past three (in small towns, at one minute past two), you find the dining-room door closed, and you must wait till six o'clock to see its hospitable door open again.

When you enter the dining room, you must not believe that you can go and sit where you like. The chief waiter assigns you a seat, and you must take it. With a superb wave of the hand he signs to you to follow him. He does not even turn round to see if you are behind him, following him in all the meanders he describes amidst the sixty, seventy, sometimes eighty, tables that are in the room. He takes it for granted that you are an obedient, submissive traveller who knows his duty. Altogether I have travelled in the United States for about ten months, and I never came across an American so independent, so daring, as to actually take any other seat than that assigned to him by that tremendous potentate, the chief waiter. Occasionally, just to try him, I would sit down in a chair I took a fancy to. But he would come and fetch me, and tell me that I could not stay there. In Europe the waiter asks you where you would like to sit. He is a paid servant, and therefore a master in America. He is in command, not of the other waiters, but of the guests. Several times, recognizing friends in the dining-room, I asked the man to take me to their tables (I should not have dared to go by myself), and the permission was granted with a patronizing sign of the head. I have constantly seen Americans stop on the threshold of the dining-room and wait until the chief waiter had returned from placing some guest to come and fetch them in their turn. I never saw them venture alone and take an empty seat without the sanction of the waiter.