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## Citation

Metcalf, Keyes D. 1947. The undergraduate and the Harvard Library, 1765-1877. Harvard Library Bulletin I (1), Winter 1947: 29-51.

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## The Undergraduate and the Harvard Library, 1765-1877

**T**HE gift from Thomas W. Lamont, Class of 1892, of a million and a half dollars for the construction at Harvard University of a library building primarily for undergraduate use was announced by President James Bryant Conant on the 21st of November 1945. This gift, at one step, carries the University the greater part of the way toward the solution of a major problem of many years' standing, and consequently makes timely an account of the problem in both its historical and contemporary setting, together with a description of the concrete measures contemplated as a remedy. This first article will cover the period up to the autumn of 1877, when John Langdon Sibley retired and Justin Winsor took his place as Librarian of Harvard College. A second article, which will appear in the Spring number of the BULLETIN, will deal with the period from 1877 to 1937, and a third, to be published in the Autumn number, will tell of the development since 1937.

During the period covered by this first article, the Harvard College Library had but two locations. The original Harvard Hall burned down in 1764, destroying a large part of the Library. It was replaced by the present Harvard Hall, which was completed in 1766. The Library at first occupied part of the second floor, but in 1815, after the building of University Hall, the whole second floor was assigned to it. Here it stayed until Gore Hall was ready in 1841, and no additional space was provided until 1877. Such library facilities as were provided for use by the undergraduates were confined to these buildings.

The writer of this article is too cautious to attempt to state the exact date when the need for an undergraduate library was first felt in Cambridge. The first definite indication that he has found stems from the fact that the College Records giving the laws for the Library on 12 December 1765 quote from a previous law still in force, reading as follows:

There shall be a part of the Library kept distinct from the rest as a smaller Library for the more common use of the College. When there are two or more sets of books, the best shall be deposited in the great Library & the others in the

great or small Library, at the discretion of the Committee for placing the books. This Committee shall also lay apart & with the assistance of the librarian prepare a catalogue of such books, as they judge proper for the smaller library.

Among the new laws for the Library in the same year, 1765, No. 5 reads:

Whereas by the former laws, no scholar under a senior Sophister might borrow a book out of the Library, this privilege is now extended to the Junior Sophisters, who shall both have liberty to borrow any books out of the smaller Library. Each student in those two classes may also borrow books out of the great Library, with the advice or approbation of their Instructors, procuring an order under the hands of the President & any two of either Professors or Tutors to the Librarian to deliver what book they shall judge proper for the perusal of such student.

Vote 4, dealing with these Library laws, reads:

That the President Mr Marsh & the Reverend Mr Eliot be chosen on the part of the Corporation to join with those who shall be chosen by the Board of Overseers, as a Committee for placing the books in the Library, that are to be lent out to the scholars.

When the law of the Library which directed the preparation of a catalogue of the books selected for the students of the College was put into effect is not known, but there was printed by the College in 1773 a 'Catalogue of the Books in the Cambridge Library selected for the more frequent Use of Harvard men who have not yet been invested with the Degree of Bachelor in Arts.' It appeared over the imprint of 'Boston: New England, Press of Edes & Gill, 1773.' It contained only twenty-seven pages, and was an alphabetical list. The title page in Latin reads: *Catalogus Librorum in Bibliotheca Cantabrigiensi Selectus, frequentiore in Usum Harvardianum, qui Gradu Baccalauri in Artibus Nondum Sunt Donati. Bostoniae: Nov. Ang. Typis Edes & Gill, M,DCC,LXXIII.* Following the title page was a 'Monitum,' or Note, in Latin, explaining the need for the volume. A translation of this note made by Professor Arthur Stanley Pease follows:

Inasmuch as the Catalogue of Books in the College Library is very long, and not to be completely unrolled, when Occasion demands, save at very great expense of time, embracing Books in almost all Tongues and about all Sciences and Arts, most of which are above the Comprehension of Younger Students, it has seemed wise to put together a briefer Catalogue, to wit, of Books which are better adapted to their use. In the following Catalogue, then, in addition to Classical Authors, there are included Books chiefly in the vernacular Tongue

and belonging to the general culture of the mind, omitting as much as possible those which are in daily use in the College, as also those which are written in foreign Languages, or which treat of specialized Disciplines, e.g., Medicine or Jurisprudence. But let no one infer from this that Students are debarred from the freer use of the Library.

Numbers attached to each Book indicate its place in the Library.

The numbers referred to in the last sentence of the note were four items after each entry in the catalogue. The first apparently indicates the alcove in which the book was found; the second the section in the alcove; the third the shelf; and the fourth the number of the book on the shelf. While the books in the list would not make exciting reading for the present-day undergraduate, a comparison between this catalogue and the 358-page one which included the complete holdings of the Library in 1790 makes it clear that there were books that were considered beyond the capacity of the average undergraduate in the eighteenth century.

Certain details of the machinery governing the use of the Library during this general period are succinctly recorded in an article on 'Harvard University: The Foundation and Growth of the College Library,' which appeared in the Sunday edition of the *Boston Herald*, 1 September 1878:

. . . One great advance that America has made over Europe is in the freedom granted to the users of books. No longer exists the old feeling that a constant use of books would wear them out and leave none to posterity. No longer prevails the thought that students must study texts and not read books. Less than 80 years ago this library was opened only two hours, with occasionally an extra two hours a week. Then there were only three classes of persons — resident graduates, seniors and juniors — admitted to the library, and these only once in three weeks, respectively in the order above mentioned. They entered the sacred portals three at a time in their alphabetical order. Until 1798 sophomores could not enter. In 1810 the freshmen were admitted. Previously the latter had never entered on their own account, but only as scouts or messengers, detailed in parties of six to serve for the day. They were sent out in pairs to summon and give notice of the approach of the squadrons of "three" that were expected by the librarian. Their reward for this service was a sight of the precincts of the library and the enjoyment of an exemption from one recitation.

Early in the nineteenth century, during what Samuel Eliot Morison in his *Three Centuries of Harvard* calls the 'Augustan Age,' the matter of facilities for undergraduates was twice brought up by men who were then Librarians of Harvard College. The central figure of this Au-

gustan Age was President John Thornton Kirkland. During his term of office, the reputation of the University throughout the country was rising rapidly, and Mr Morison states that a larger proportion of Harvard graduates of this period became distinguished than at any previous or subsequent era. The Harvard Library at this time was beginning to reach the stage when it was a factor in the life of the undergraduate. Most American college library collections of the early nineteenth century were made up chiefly of gifts and bequests; a large percentage of their contents came from alumni who were or had been clergymen, and it is not surprising that the volumes were more often than not theological in character and were not as a rule of any particular interest to the average undergraduate unless he was expecting to enter the ministry. The Harvard College Library throughout Kirkland's administration was the largest in terms of number of volumes in the United States, and also probably the highest in quality. The Hollis gifts had given it real distinction and importance to scholars. The Ebeling purchase in 1818 raised it to the rank of a research library. There were enough books that attracted undergraduates to make a problem for the custodians.

The term of office of the Librarian in those days was generally a short one — forty-four men served in this position in the eighteenth century — but in 1813 Andrews Norton, later a distinguished professor in the University, and the father of Charles Eliot Norton, became Librarian, to serve for what was then considered a long term of eight years. After Mr Norton had had an opportunity to study the situation, he wrote in 1815 to President Kirkland a letter which indicates that the question of a separate library for undergraduates was on the President's mind and that a report and recommendations on the service to undergraduates had been asked for. The report, which is quoted here in full, leaves no doubt as to what the Librarian at that time considered the proper solution of the problem. It reads:

Dear sir,

You requested me to state the advantages which I thought would result from separating the books intended for the use of the Undergraduates from the General Library, and keeping them in a room by themselves, so as to form a distinct library. It seems to me that the following would be among these advantages.

1. The object of a Library where valuable and rare books are deposited for preservation, and for occasional use by those who will use them carefully, and the object of one to contain common books for circulation among the students, many of which from their continual use must be destroyed in a short course of

years, appear to be essentially distinct, — and it would seem that both these objects therefore ought not to be confounded together in a single collection of books. In procuring books as the library is at present constituted, it is by no means easy to consult at once two objects so distinct. It may be sometimes an objection to procuring valuable books, that they are too expensive to be exposed to the injury and destruction which they must be if suffered to go into common use — or on the other it may be an objection to procuring common books that we have already copies of them in the Library, though perhaps these copies are too costly and valuable for circulation among the students — or it may be said that it is not proper /wh. indeed seems to be the case/ to crowd the Library of a University with such works and such copies of them as may be found in every common bookstore. The difficulty I mention I think will be, and has been, found greater in practice than it may appear at first sight. And even if this were not the case, still it seems improper that the Library of a University should contain such a heterogeneous assemblage of books as it must if a considerable proportion of them are selected merely on account of their fitness for the use of undergraduates.

2. It has been the practice till of late years to deliver to the students any book indiscriminately from the Library that any one might ask for, with the exception of a very small list of prohibited books — most of which likewise were prohibited only as being skeptical or immoral. The consequence has been that many valuable works, and such as cannot be replaced, or replaced without difficulty, have been injured and defaced. In addition to this, little attention has been paid to procuring cheap editions of works of which there were costly ones in the Library; but the latter have been suffered to go into circulation. The Library has therefore suffered great unnecessary waste and injury. Nor are either of these evils at present entirely remedied. Indeed the only remedy for the first has been the Librarian's assuming the power of refusing such books, as he thought it improper should be allowed to circulate among the students. The first evil must continue in a considerable degree as long as the students are allowed to use the General Library indiscriminately. It might it is true be remedied by having a list made out of books which only, the undergraduates should be allowed to use: even if these books remained in the same room with the others. It seems to me that it would be only a further improvement to have the books themselves separated. Nor would the making out of such a list prevent all the inconveniences to which we are at present exposed.

3. For — either *for the sake of preserving the books*, the students must be prohibited from reading and consulting them in the Library — or *for the sake of their benefit*, they must be permitted to come in and use them as at present; or in some similar manner. To continue the present practice subjects the Library to considerable injury. Many scholars come in unacquainted with the value of books, and without any thought of acting improperly, but from mere curiosity, take down from the shelves a great number, and in doing so, use them without much care: so that there is considerable gradual injury without any advantage in return. In the present state of college, I do not think there is much to fear

from wanton mischief and depredation. Perhaps however it should be recollected, that these will not be prevented by the good dispositions of the great majority, but may be the result of the want of principle in a very few. After the information which I have received from Mr Shaw respecting the Athenaeum, and which I presume is known to yourself and the gentlemen of the corporation; and after similar information which I have received respecting the College Athenaeum of the Students, I do not think that there would be any reason to be surprised, if a number of books were lost from the College Library during the present year. — It is true that the evils which I speak of might be remedied by prohibiting the scholars to take books for themselves from the shelves of the Library; and requiring them to ask for any one they should want from the gentleman attending. This however would be such a total interruption of his time, /beside exposing him to a variety of vexations/ as no person would submit to without a very considerable compensation. — If there were a particular library for the use of students, they might be admitted freely without any ill-consequences of much importance. If books were injured or lost, it would be only a pecuniary loss: as the books in such library would be for the most part such as could easily be replaced.

There is another evil attending the present practice respecting the admission of undergraduates, which I do not myself however think /at least at present/ to be a very serious one. Gentlemen of the government have sometimes complained to me of interruption from the number of students in the Library, many of whom come in from mere curiosity.

4. I believe if more attention were apparently paid to the preservation of the Library by those who have the care of it; more attention would be paid to the same object by those who might continue to have the use of it. So many of the books are now exposed to that sort of circulation by which they must soon be defaced and injured, that scarce any one feels much obligation to be very careful of any book that he may borrow. There are none of those associations and feelings connected with the library which there ought to be with one for the preservation of valuable works. It is too open and too much exposed to the worst sort of use. — I should think likewise that there would be more donations of valuable books to the Library, if there were a greater certainty of their being properly esteemed and carefully preserved.

5. The appearance of the General Library would be much improved by separating from it the books particularly intended for the students, and forming them into a distinct library. Its shelves would not be so vacant as many of them often are. The books which it would contain would not be so many of them cheap and common; nor would there be such an appearance of injured and defaced books as there at present is. — The books likewise would not be marked and written in, sometimes indecently as I fear is even now done; and which heretofore has been much more the case.

The advantages then of having two distinct libraries as has been proposed seem to me to be generally these.

That the objects of both would be better consulted.

That the General Library would from various causes be far better preserved: which I conceive to be the principal advantage — and

That its appearance would be much improved.

I have taken the liberty of addressing these statements to you personally, as it seemed to afford the most simple form of making them. Whatever may appear to you proper you can lay before the Corporation.

I am very respectfully, etc

/s/ Andrews Norton

No attempt will be made here to discuss the statements made by Mr. Norton, but his letter does give what seems to be a clear picture of the situation as it stood one hundred and thirty-two years ago. The Library was apparently being used rather freely by undergraduates and the Librarian was worried about the damage that the books were suffering. He was enough of an old-fashioned librarian to feel that his first duty was the preservation of books, and he was probably less interested in their use than in their preservation. But he had come to the point where he realized that undergraduates did need to use books from a library, and he was ready to recommend in the year 1815 a separate library for undergraduates. In the following year the Library records indicate that a separate list of books for undergraduates was again drawn up in order to help the situation.

Norton was succeeded in 1821 by Joseph Green Cogswell, whose term as Librarian continued only two years, but who was so active during those years in recataloguing and reclassifying the whole Library that the period is a landmark in its history. Later, as head of the Astor Library in New York, Cogswell became one of the few American librarians to make a real contribution to the profession before modern library history began in 1876. His great interest was in library collections, and at the Astor Library he built the first well-rounded reference collection in the United States. As might have been expected, he emphasized, during his term at Harvard, the contents of the Library and the technical processes by which the books might be made available rather than the actual service of the books. On 6 November 1822, he made a long report to the Harvard Corporation which began with a paragraph reading:

Having completed the arrangement of the Library in conformity to your directions, I beg leave to lay before you the following account of its present condition, & to subjoin a few remarks, explaining my views in relation to it.



Cogswell then proceeded to explain the Baconian classification that he had installed. He told of his decision to make an alphabetical instead of a classed catalogue. He brought up the question of the condition of the Library and the need of binding many of the books. He reported on the sale of duplicates, showing in this connection some trepidation and fear that the Corporation might not approve of the action that he had taken. He stated that the College Library consisted of 19,900 volumes, supplemented by 800 volumes in the Medical Library, 500 in the Law Library, and 380 connected with the Natural History Professorship. He then continued as follows:

The foregoing facts furnish you with a full account of the present situation of the library, allow me now to add a few observations upon it. The great question to be settled before you determine what system is to be adopted & what measures are to be taken in regard to its future management is, whether you consider the principal purpose of it to be, to make a library for men of learning or to furnish books for the accommodation of undergraduates: If the latter, it is already far larger than necessary, if the former it is but a beginning, a single star in the constellation which ought to beautify & illumine our part of the hemisphere. I must suppose, that you prefer the most important of these objects, or I have nothing to say; in this case, then, what should determine the choice of books, to be selected for it? in my opinion the first circumstance to be observed is rarity, not however entirely disregarding intrinsic value — rarity I mean, which arises either from the voluminousness & value of the work, or from the accident of its being out of print, or from the small number of copies originally printed, or from its being one of a character & upon a subject to interest but few & consequently to be owned but by few. This principle would bring in the Byzantine historians in preference to Gibbon, Twysden's *Scriptores Decem* before Hume & Hicke's *Thesaurus* before Johnson's *Dictionary* & should it not be so & where else could a scholar hope to find either of the three first named works, if not in the principal public library in the country, & how easily might he find any of the others at every turn. The next object is to complete the collection in the several departments, to enable the enquirer to exhaust the subject of his enquiry, by the aids which you can furnish him: A library which is known to be distinguished by either of these characteristics will be resorted to by men of learning, & men desirous of becoming so. We have a few of the first described treasures, & our department of American history is very near the degree of completeness, which would entitle it to receive the mark. I will mention one case by way of illustration — there is a single 8vo volume, of no uncommon beauty, in one of our Alcoves, entirely unknown to 999 of every 1000 who use the library, which would sell quick in London for \$75 or perhaps an \$100, a sum which would buy a good many classical dictionaries & Port Royal Gr. Grammars, & even a few sets [*sic*] of Rollin & Ferguson & such like matter, — but where is the champion of utility who would come forward & propose to exchange this

copy of "Hearne's Acta Apostolorum" for its value in such books — how much more pride would be felt in showing this copy of Hearne to a scholar, than in having an hundred or two more volumes which are every where to be met with to swell your Catalogue — nay more, would it not be better for the cause of learning that this copy, the only one in the country I believe, of this very rare book, of which there were originally but 120 copies, should be kept in case of need, than that common class books without number, should be dealt out to those, who might just as well be supplied otherwise. I well remember what triumph it was some six or eight years since, that our library furnished to the Abbe Cona a work not be found in Philadelphia & even to this day, whenever we are spoken of in that American Athens, this is always told of us. It is true, this is not worth much, but it serves to explain how a really learned library may be serviceable to learned men & how the institution with which it is connected may gain reputation by it. To sum up all I have said on this head, I would aim principally to make the library subserve the wants of scholars, & not those of common readers; common books every body owns, or can have access to, rare & costly ones properly belong to those deposits, around which a learned community collects.

But the library it may be said makes an essential part of the machinery of the institution, which cannot go on without it. This is no doubt true & I would by no means propose to stop it, but merely to regulate it. The law requiring the books for the Undergraduates to be designated, should be strictly enforced; their Catalogue should be distinct & the books not upon it, should be the same to them as if not in the library. Whenever a particular course of study or any other circumstance made it expedient to depart from the regulation, it should be done in a manner prescribed — No library book should be allowed to be used as a class book under any circumstances, such a use being wholly inconsistent with its proper preservation & with a due regard to the rights of others. If thought necessary to aid the poor students in procuring their class books, it should be done independently by the library & in a way to secure the College against loss. Nothing whatever can prosper without system & order, & in nothing are system and order more requisite than in the management of a library, by the aid of these & of economy & good judgment in appropriating the scanty funds, which it now has, a sensible & important increase may annually be made, but certainly not upon the principle of buying 20 copies of one book, 10 of another & so on.

Allow me to ask your attention to the subject of a Catalogue as soon as may be, as I am particularly desirous of bringing my work in the Library to a close. In the hope of meeting your approbation, I submit the accompanying memoranda to your examination, trusting that whatever you may think of my judgment, you will be persuaded of my fidelity in managing the concerns, which have been entrusted to me.

I have the honor to be with

the greatest respect, Gentlemen,

Your most obt. svt.

/s/ Jos. G. Cogswell

Mr. Cogswell was not considered a conservative in his day. With George Ticknor and Edward Everett, he had gone to Germany for graduate study as the first group of the ever increasing number of American scholars who in the next hundred years studied abroad and did so much to determine the course of higher education in this country. He was one of the founders of the Round Hill School at Northampton, which, if not the first of our progressive schools, might well be considered as one of the first to improve the status of American secondary education. His great work in building up the Astor Library and cataloguing it has already been mentioned. His influence on the Harvard Library did not close with his two-year term in 1823, but continued directly or indirectly all his long life, and in 1864, over forty years later, after his retirement from the Astor Library, he came back to Cambridge and was the friend and confidant of John Langdon Sibley, who was Librarian of the Harvard College Library from 1855 to 1877. If in library matters Cogswell was what we would now call conservative, he was at least a product of his time, and it is interesting to note that in his early days at the Astor Library he wrote to George Ticknor saying:

The readers average from one to two hundred daily, and they read excellent books, except the young fry who employ all the hours they are out of school in reading the trashy, as Scott, Cooper, Dickens, *Punch*, and the *Illustrated News*.

It is not surprising, then, that he decried the use of the general collection at Harvard by undergraduates whose needs he thought could be cared for in other ways, and his report quoted above confirms the letter of Andrews Norton that there was a problem in regard to what the Harvard College Library should do for undergraduates. Sixteen days before Cogswell presented his report, he wrote to President Kirkland to explain why he could not accept a Corporation appointment as Librarian as follows:

The Corporation consider the most important object of it [the Library] to be the accommodation of the undergraduates with books to facilitate them in the prosecution of their elementary studies, & they are most likely to be right, but I cannot come to their opinion, & I cannot persuade myself that the opportunities I have enjoyed are turned to good account in devoting my life to labours which might as well be performed by any shop boy from a circulating library . . .

Cogswell may have misjudged the Harvard Corporation, as that body did not provide library facilities for undergraduates of a high enough

quality to prevent them, during this period and the two following generations, from building up small book collections of their own that went by the general term of Student Society Libraries. It is hoped that the story of these libraries at Harvard will be told in this BULLETIN or elsewhere in the not too distant future. It should be added, however, that the Harvard undergraduates apparently received enough consideration in the College Library so that their own student libraries did not reach the full flower that was found at Yale and in many other colleges with smaller enrollments and less distinguished collections, but the consideration received was not sufficient to quiet all complaints. At any rate on 12 June 1848, President Edward Everett received a letter written by Walter Mitchell of the Class of 1846, which inveighed against the Library Rules. Mitchell had done more than creditable work in college. He had won a Bowdoin Prize for an essay on the Roman Catholic Church in America. After graduation he studied at the Harvard Law School and was admitted to the Bar. He later was ordained in the Protestant Episcopal Church and became in due course a Divinity School professor. He contributed to the *Atlantic Monthly* and wrote two novels as well as poetry, and delivered the Phi Beta Kappa poem at Harvard in 1875. His letter is so revealing of library conditions in the Harvard of a hundred years ago that, in spite of its length, it is printed here in full:

[Cambridge 12 June 1848]

Hon Edward Everett.

Dear Sir.

I have ventured to address you upon a matter which is deeply interesting to myself and to that body of which I was but yesterday a member, — the subject of Harvard College Library.

It is after long thought and with much hesitation that I do this. I cannot tell how you may receive it, whether as an ill judged intrusion of crude opinions — or as the act of well-meaning sincerity, that is its own sufficient apology.

But I have also felt that from the difference of our positions, there might be some avenues of observation open to me, that were denied to you — and that the views of one fresh from the habits, the prejudices and associations of undergraduate life, might suggest something not altogether familiar or useless.

I have endeavoured to do this truly and respectfully — and I am the more encouraged, knowing, though my experience was very brief, the kindness and courtesy with which a student's wishes were always listened to by you.

It can hardly be that the gift of a degree is to be a sentence of banishment, closing forever and at once the mutual confidences and sympathies of the Student and the President — I would rather hope that those who yet linger here; before

going forth into the world — have a place in your regard — and that however you may look upon the request — you will not judge harshly of the asker.

It is in this hope, Sir — that these pages are submitted to your notice.

What is the present system of the library and what are the reasons for its adoption?

The hours of admission are inconvenient, they are reduced — few as they are — by the constant encroachments of the lecture and the recitation.

During one term in my junior year — there was left me but *two hours* in the week when I could obtain books — this may be remedied now — but I scarcely see how *any* arrangement of recitations can give to the student the full time which he is nominally allowed. The days — when it would be most accessible to the student — are not library days — Friday afternoon, Saturday — and days like the present — (the 1st Monday in June) would be a large and a grateful addition.

Nor is this scanty allotment of time made properly available.

Were you ever in the Library at the hour when a class are obtaining books?

You must have seen I think something of the difficulties I now write of.

The only way by which the student is to discover what the shelves contain is the catalogue — seven or eight large volumes. It is not possible to use these undisturbed for ten minutes at a time and the student has to find not only where it is to be looked for — but *what* he wants.

The student comes here to *learn* his needs as well as to supply them. He cannot be supposed to know of the existence even of the greater part of the hoarded wealth those shelves contain.

Well for him if he have even a clue by which to find it — but he is not sent to College with his brain already an encyclopaedia of authors — a compendium of title pages — he must draw at random from the long list of unfamiliar names — “hoping for the best and fearing the worst” Give him leave to enter and select for himself — from *among the books* not from among their titles merely.

All that the lecture room and the recitation can do is to give him subjects for study — to put him on the track of investigation — he cannot travel back to the fountain head — by poring over the cat. twice a week — and carrying off to his room one or two chance-selected volumes.

Place yourself, Sir, in the position of an undergraduate — You are interested — many of us are [not as] idle as we may seem in the lecture room and at the recitation — in the solution of an historical doubt. Your faith in the integrity of Hampden — and the guilt of Wentworth has been shaken by some artful Royalist — and you wish to examine for yourself.

Into contemporary memorials, speeches — letters — through different historians — and tractarians your search leads — in the course of two or three hours you would examine nearly a hundred volumes. — Seat yourself in the librarian's room — and send for your books as you perforce must. After the first six requests — the seventh will probably meet with an answer that will effectually put to rest your spirit of inquiry — and probably send you indignantly from the hall.

I have no ill feeling towards the officers in charge of the library. Far otherwise. Few in my class made more constant demands on them than I did — and I

cannot now recall a single instance of discourtesy and neglect in anything that was in their power to grant. I have many favours — and which, knowing the strictness of the laws in force, I felt to be truly favours — to thank them for.

But I put to [*sic*] to you, Sir, how is it possible for an officer — harrassed by conflicting claims for assistance, sought by twenty different applicants at once, to be otherwise than seemingly negligent and impatient. And how too is it possible for the student, especially the retiring or the high spirited, whom *one* sharp word is enough to silence when asking a favour, not to be discouraged?

I have known, and not once or twice only, students to leave the hall unsatisfied — and feeling that they would not soon again expose themselves to such unpleasant usage.

I can give from my own knowledge an instance of the extreme difficulty a student meets with. While in College a student formed a plan of investigation — to take a favorite book — Macauley's [*sic*] essays, I believe, — and marking every allusion in it that was obscure to him to find and note down the explanation. But he could not visit the library when he would — on his leisure days, in his leisure hours, it was closed — he could not, when there, take down the volumes from their shelves — nor could he venture to trouble the librarian for a book for which five minutes use would suffice, that officer had enough to do to furnish those who were taking out books for the week — and it was too precious a privilege to be wasted on books of references. Having proceeded with his plan just far enough to be convinced of its usefulness to himself — he was obliged to abandon it.

But this is not all — the student enters and leaves the hall with a character hanging over him bad as that of a suspected pickpocket.

He is made to *leave his cloak and cap at the door*, that they may not serve to conceal his spoils.

Across every alcove stands a bar forbidding him to enter. Into that pleasant little chamber that forms the Eastern arm of the transept of which the very air is redolent of study — he must not set his foot. Even the presence of a college officer is no safeguard against the tinglings of dishonesty supposed to thrill in student fingers. I was once *ordered* from the alcove into which I had gone with Mr Torrey to select a French author in which to find material for a version — thinking in such company the imputation might be for a moment suspended.

I am not aware that my case was peculiar. I was never detected in any theivery [*sic*] in Gore Hall, nor if my memory is true, was I ever liable to be. I presume any one of my sixty-five classmates would have been equally dreaded.

This may seem a little thing to those who are far above it — but it is a bitter — a *humiliating* consciousness to those upon whom it is laid — not the less so, Sir, because unmerited — and I have known some who will and would never cross that threshold — having once felt the degradation of such treatment.

What are the reasons of this policy, and the objections to a change — to introducing the same system now pursued in the law library? One reason is the alleged depredation and injury to the books. But what, Sir, is the object of the library? Were all those munificent donations given simply for the use of the thirty or forty privileged persons who are permitted to use it — or for the gen-

eral use of the College? Will not all the losses under the most liberal estimates of damage be overbalanced by the increased good accomplished? This is a question for your own mind — I propose to look at another point. Does the present system preserve the books from injury and depredation?

The books it is said may be marked and defaced while in the hands of students and no one made responsible. They are now placed in the hands of the student and credited to him so that every injury is traceable to the offender. Is this so? I do not think deliberate wanton injury is feared. I cannot think that the mischievous spirit is so rife among undergraduates — that they are a set of destructive monkeys who pull in pieces all they lay hands on. Most of them have their own little collections and know how dear a treasured volume may become to its possessor.

The injuries feared are those of thoughtlessness and forgetfulness — marginal notings, underscorings and marks of admiration. Now these are not to be detected without a close scrutiny. The librarian if he would make this regulation answer its ends must examine each volume when received *page by page* — or the greater part of these defacings must escape his notice — and this must be done every time or the blame will light on the wrong head.

That he *does* not do so, you are well aware, that he *could* not do so — is perhaps equally clear — it would require a score of clerks in full employment. More than that — I have reason to know that no small proportion of the books that leave the library leave it clandestinely.

You cannot prevent this — as long as you deny to the student the privilege of using the books on the spot. He does not offend against his own moral sense by so doing. He feels himself debarred from the free use of what was meant for him to use freely, by restrictions that to him seem absurd and harsh — and you know that these petty restrictions sit lightly on a student's conscience.

This may seem inconsistent with what I have just stated — with the complaint that the student is harshly and unjustly suspected — but it is not so. I am stating facts — speaking for all classes, for those who will — and those who will not violate the college laws. I wish to show that you insult the high minded and honorable by preventive laws that do not prevent — that you are trying the most irrational of attempts to make power felt without making it beneficent, that you suffer the student to slip into the alcove long enough to carry away a book — not long enough to examine and replace it.

The only way that smuggling has ever been effectually broken up, I believe, has been not by any improvement of preventive systems — but by a *repeal of the duties*.

Let the student consult the books in the library, and depend upon it, Sir, he will not be silly enough to run the risk of forfeiting his privileges, by carrying them away without leave.

But this after all is not the thing feared — the student is not aggrieved [*sic*] because he and his classmates are suspecting [*sic*] of smuggling the volumes in and out — but because he is accused of wishing to *steal* them — to carry them away — not to use them — he cannot of course put them in his library — but to *sell them* to unscrupulous dealers.

I remember one unfortunate instance, to which I need not allude more pointedly, that has happened since I left college.

From the little I know of the guilty party I should not hesitate to pronounce him *not* a perfectly free moral agent — there were many occurrences [*sic*] in his college career which would warrant the belief that there was a partial defect of mind either inherent or induced — that took from the act its worst character.

You knew of the fact, but you could hardly know the strong pervading indignation with which it was regarded by the undergraduates. And this was done, too, in spite of the laws. Is it not, Sir, an axiom of legislation that restrictions that fail of their purpose are *worse* than useless?

But why not rely on the honour of the student? From your position you see the worst side of undergraduate character. It is only when the student is counselling mischief that his words are reported to you — when he is dissuading it his voice never reaches so far. But you admit these young gentlemen to your parlour without fear for the ornaments of your table. Mr Monroe and Mr Nichols spread their counters with their most attractive works — and though the costly volumes lie invitingly around — and no argus watches — the great distinctions of meum and tuum remain inviolated. But as he enters Gore Hall the soul of Barrington or Hardy Vaux takes possession of the hitherto ingenuous freshman — temptation becomes irresistible [*sic*] — and nothing but the most rigid laws — and the sleepless vigilance of three lynx-eyed librarians — and an assistant porter can prevent an immediate and wholesale plunder.

Pardon me, Sir, if I have spoken too lightly, but I have felt this inconsistency strongly.

Why not introduce the plan now in use in the Law library? That is open from early morning till nine at night — the books are in every ones reach — there are no forbidden alcoves or jealous officials, it is free to come and go without let or hindrance. The rule forbidding loud conversation is enforced only by the spirit of mutual gentlemanly courtesy — and it is *well* enforced. There are books there which are valuable to the student not only as present helps but as future needs, the actual tools of his trade — expensive, hardly won, to the poor almost unattainable. Here is a strong temptation. I cannot believe the standard of morality is so much higher in the Law School than in the College. The whole character of the College — its higher requirements for admission — a certificate of good moral character is one, — its stricter discipline purging it of all grosser elements — should make it a more exclusive circle, superior in morals and manners.

What then is the actual loss of the law library? I have seen the librarian's statements — and the average loss for a term *inclusive* of text books furnished is *six volumes*. This during the past year. Even these few are not certainly ascertained to be lost. Many of the books are known under two titles and are thus overlooked. Some are mislaid in the chambers of the professors — but sooner or later the lost volumes come back almost without exception.

Is this slight loss a sufficient reason for shutting out the undergraduates year after year from the use and the enjoyment of the best library in America. Was it for this that so much time and wealth has been spent — that the hoarded talents



should sleep, each in its napkin of dust — undisturbed except by a periodical migration from the northern to the southern alcove — and back again?

I have heard it said that students have no need of more time in and freer access to the library — that they have quite enough to occupy them in the course of study marked out. This may be the *theory* of college life — but it is not the fact.

There are many here — no small part of each class, who are sent to college not because they have any decided bent for study either in one branch or in all, but to pass away those years that must come between their school days and their entrance into active life.

They will not, they cannot be induced to give more time to the studies appointed than is necessary to a tolerable appearance at recitations.

They are left to fill up many idle hours with more agreeable resources.

Now — those hours are spent in social visiting, in listless lounging, or still more exceptionably.

If they are fond of reading, their resorts are now the Society libraries, and that magazine of trash called the "Cambridge Circulating Library."

If they are not, the billiard room and the chambers of their classmates are the place to kill their ennuied and miserable hours.

Would they not, Sir, if the library were thrown open to them, resort there in preference?

If you ask for proof — see how eagerly and constantly they flock to the book-stores where they can take up a volume without the interference of a janitor or the suspicion of petty larceny.

And further more, Sir, is it not a change that you would gladly see? Would it not lessen your cares and anxieties? Would it not be pleasanter when called upon in the exercise of your duty to reprove a student for his neglect of college exercises to feel that his derelictions had been in the direction of Gore Hall instead of the billiard room and smoking club? And on the whole would not such literary dissipation be far more likely to lead back active and gifted minds into the paths of severer study than the coarse and feeble imitations of their elder's debauchery which now entice the college roués [*sic*].

But beside these there are many, who looking upon their college life in its truest light feel that their days here are golden days and who gladly seek from their Alma Mater the rich bounty she proffers.

Among them are different tastes — habits of thought and capacities — tending, some to the one side, some to the other. It has not been the system of Harvard to bind upon a procrustean rack of culture her various children — to send out her alumni drilled like a regiment into uniformity and mechanical movement — the present elective system evidences the wiser, freer policy of the great American University.

It is to such that the library should offer the means of development — to each in his chosen path. It is from the lecture room and the recitation that the student should come to follow out here the work that is there but half-finished — but hardly begun.

I am afraid, Sir, the principle of emulation has been sometimes permitted to

encroach unduly upon the material objects of this institution, that in the anxiety to make "first scholars" it has been sometimes forgotten to prepare for making great men. Is it altogether improbably that the four years might not be spent amid those books in free communion with them — quite as profitably as in the ordinary course?

But in the fear lest the race for honours should not be fairly and hotly contested — everything like help from without is steadily discouraged — and the better editions of our text books put without our reach — lest we should gain the start of some equally diligent but less favoured classmate.

You have been an instructor here, Sir, and must have known how necessarily restricted the help given in the lecture and at the recitation must be — how much is merely suggested — how much more passed over in silence. I was struck with a recent remark of a college friend, as we were engaged in the law library in following a train of investigation suggested in the lecture of the previous hour. "How little we should have thought of doing this in College!"

And why? — Not because we did not *wish* so to do, that we never were puzzled by a difficulty — or allured by the brilliancy of a subject — but because the labor of getting *one* reference, given us in the recitation, was rendered too tedious and formidable by the restrictions of the library. Take one book, used as a text book in College — Smyth's lectures on History and estimate its comparative value used with and without access to collateral information.

What is learned *for recitation* — is *ended* with recitation. The spur of emulation — the fear of blame — is sufficient for the hour, and ends with the hour — what is acquired for its own sake does not depart so speedily. Is the object of Harvard College, its true glory, to gratify its semi-annual committees with well got up scholastic reviews — or to send into the world young men, who shall be the foremost among good citizens and useful men.

It is the sneer of those who would decry the college that the student learns only to forget — that the graduate even before his degree has been drawn from its pink ribbons would make but a sorry figure at a preparatory examination.

We know that this is untrue, but is there not some shadow of foundation for the charge?

One more word upon the present restrictions and I have done with them, at least with their working upon the students feelings.

If I were writing to one who would ask of every reform "Cui bono?" — who would try all issues by a material standard, I should forbear.

But with literary men the 'sweet influences' of books — the charm of great libraries — has been no infrequent or ungrateful theme. Many a passage of eloquent enthusiasm must be familiar to you in praise of such retreats and by you I do not fear to be misunderstood.

You can well appreciate the daily refining of the intellect, the ripening culture which this constant intercourse with those silent friends produces — and your own experience must have made you fully alive to the exquisite enjoyment with which the lover of literature looks upon the collected treasures — the garnered harvests of great minds — his pleasure in rare editions, his warmth of greeting to old friends in newer and costlier dresses — the keen relish with which

he falls upon the feast of which he hitherto [has] been fed by scanty fragments.

You have been too, on classic ground and amid scenes of which every portion have become historical — and none could better appreciate the privilege. But how would you have felt to have entered your paradise of association watched like a thief [*sic*] — to have been marched around the tomb of Achilles with a sentinel at your elbow — and to have been met at the entrance of the Acropolis by a placard of “No admittance”?

One further reason for this change is that it would furnish a common ground where students and professors might meet more cordially. No one, if I have rightly understood has been more interested in bringing about a more cordial intercourse between the two than yourself, and I have the testimony of those who more than twenty years ago were your pupils, to the pleasure and profit of such an intercourse, and to your success in awakening a mutual interest and sympathy in the studies in which you as professor they as undergraduates were engaged. One of them, the Rev Wm H. Furness of Philadelphia, spoke to me in the warmest terms of his grateful and pleasurable remembrance of that intercourse.

I cannot think that all the difficulty is on the side of the student — but in the recitation room it is hard to have it otherwise than as it now is. There is among undergraduates a prejudice against those who seek for explanation after recitations. It is considered to be for the purpose of currying favour, or as it is called in cant phrase “fishing” — and it prevents many who really wish aid from asking it.

It is an unreasonable — but a powerful feeling. The most influential minds in a class are those who generally least need or are least inclined to seek assistance, and they have not found it their interest to combat the prejudice.

Could this place of meeting be once thrown open it would silently but surely cure this evil.

Nothing in the intercourse of the late Judge Story with his pupils is spoken of with such kind affectionate remembrance as the daily meetings with him in the library of Dane Hall.

I have written these pages, Sir, with the earnest feeling that has been growing and gathering strength for years. I know that in them I but utter the language and give expression to the wishes of those beneath your charge.

If I have spoken unwisely, I ask but one more favour — that you will forget this communication and its author as speedily as possible.

I trust I have not given offence, but “I could not choose but write” — and as I thought and felt I wrote. I could do no otherwise.

It will profit me nothing — a few days more and Cambridge so long a home — will be to me only a place of pleasant memories — but I shall hear with most sincere gratification of those changes which would have made it still happier to me.

With grateful remembrance, Sir, of your past kindnesses —

I remain very respectfully yours

/s/ Walter Mitchell a  
member of the Class of 1846

On 13 June 1848, the day after President Everett received Mr Mitchell's letter, he replied to it as follows:

Dear Sir,

I have read with interest your well-written paper on the use of the Library, & will lay it before the Corporation, within whose control, & not that of the Faculty, the Library is. —

The subject is involved in difficulty. It has ever been the wish of the Corporation to make the library as widely useful as possible: — And no public library in Europe or America, with which I am acquainted, is more liberally administered. —

Still I wish it were in our power to throw it more widely open; & the question whether this is possible, is well worth a careful consideration. —

I remain, very truly

Yours

/s/ Edward Everett

No notice has been found in the Corporation Records that President Everett ever laid the matter before that body. Since he resigned the next year, it may have been that he was too busy with other concerns, or it might be that he was simply living up to his well-earned reputation of being a do-nothing administrator.

The library picture painted by Walter Mitchell was one that could have been duplicated in most mid-nineteenth-century American college and university libraries. There may have been exceptions, and there were of course in many colleges, including Harvard, undergraduates who by hook or crook managed to make considerable use of their college libraries, but the librarians as a whole, at Harvard and elsewhere, thought of themselves first as guardians and custodians of their books and then as the servants of the Faculty and of such graduate students as attended the institution rather than of the undergraduates for whom text books were somehow supposed to cover all literary needs. The tale of John Langdon Sibley, which has been told so often, can well be repeated at this time, since it need no longer be considered apocryphal, and since it shows so well the attitude of a librarian in the mid-nineteenth century. It will be remembered that the story goes as follows.

Sibley was known as a man who took his duties seriously and not often did a smile cross his countenance. But one day, as he walked through the Yard, his face beamed, and Charles W. Eliot, then about to become Assistant Professor of Mathematics, asked him what made him so happy that day. Sibley replied, 'All the books but two are in,

and I am on my way to get them.' Three confirming points can now be added to this story. First, the Reverend Samuel A. Eliot reports a distinct recollection that his father (President Eliot) told him the story as a first-hand experience. Second, the library regulations in Sibley's time provided that each year all the books borrowed from the Library must be returned to the shelves at the close of the college year and checked up and reported to the Overseers' Committee on the Library as being in their places. And third, Sibley's Library Journal for 23 June 1858 has the following entry: 'Books called in for the Annual Examination. Fifty-seven persons delinquents, among the worst of whom are some of the College Officers.' The same journal for 16 July 1858 states: 'The Library Committee met at Gore Hall and examined various part [*sic*] of the Library. All the books were returned except one charged to Prof Agassiz & another to Prof Gray.'

The letters and reports of Andrews Norton, Joseph Green Cogswell, and Walter Mitchell that have been printed above give a fair picture of the general situation, but quotations from the Library Regulations add to it. A small broadside published in 1823, entitled *Library Regulations for Undergraduates*, reads as follows:

I. Any student wishing to borrow books from the Library, is to leave a list of the same with the Librarian or his Assistant, dated, and signed by such student. The Library will be open for receiving these applications, on Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday, from 1 to 2 o'clock, P.M.

II. The Library will be open on Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, and Friday, during half an hour after Morning Commons, for delivering, on each day, the books thus applied for on the day preceding.

III. The classes will apply for books, at the times abovementioned, in the following order, viz. the Seniors and Juniors on Monday and Thursday; the Sophomores on Tuesday; the Freshmen on Wednesday.

IV. The times for returning books to the Library will be the same as those appointed for leaving a list of books to be borrowed.

V. Students are not permitted to go into any of the alcoves, or take down any book from the shelves, but books which they may wish to consult, will be delivered to them for that purpose by one of the Library Officers in attendance.

The *Library Regulations* published in a four-page leaflet probably about the same period included the following rules which are somewhat more encouraging to the student thirsting for information:

V. At all times while the Library is regularly open, any member of the University may consult books by applying to the Library officer in attendance. But books must not be taken from the shelves by others than the officers charged

with the care of them, and must be left by the persons who have used them, on the table provided for the purpose.

VI. Members of the Government of the University and other persons authorized to borrow books from the Library, will receive them on application, made either personally or in writing.

VII. The Librarian will be in attendance during the half hour immediately after morning commons, and from 1 to 2 o'clock in the afternoon. He will also select the books to be issued from the Library, according to the lists, after the Library is closed in the afternoon. The Librarian moreover is to give to the Undergraduates an occasional lecture on the Library, making them acquainted with the most rare and valuable works.

The University Archives include a considerable amount of printed material in regard to the Library for the thirties, forties, fifties, and sixties. There are lists of duplicates for sale. There are appeals to the graduates of the University to present books to the Library, and a proposal that each graduate give one book each year, and in that way help to build the collections. There is a long appeal from President Quincy published in 1833, asking for help from the Legislature of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. There are reports from the Librarian and from the Visiting Committee. Many of them speak of the shameful deficiency in the collections of the Library. One report published in *The Atlas*, a Boston newspaper, on 26 February 1857, says:

. . . The Library of Harvard College has an income appropriated to the purchase of books, which amounts to the magnificent sum of three or four hundred dollars per annum. Three or four hundred dollars per annum is the sum which Massachusetts expends in providing books for the hundreds of students who crowd the halls of her ancient and famous University, — for the hundreds of scholars and literary men, to whose learning and labors she owes her high reputation among civilized States. We believe she pays about seven times as much annually for the inspection of pickled fish.

But in all this there is little indication that the University or the Library staff were greatly worried about the library service provided for the undergraduate except in a negative manner. The University Archives do include many lists of 'prohibited books.' The Faculty Records, for instance, in 1771 state: 'Agreed, not to sign any License for Books of Anatomy & Physick to Undergraduates, except to Senior Sophisters after the Winter Vacation.' One of the lists of prohibited books, that is, books not to be made available to undergraduates, reads as follows:

### Prohibited Books

The novels in the new Library  
 The Gentleman's Magazine  
 The London Magazine  
 The Monthly & Critical Reviews  
 The Annual Register  
 The Set of the Encyclopaedia in the 10th Alcove, unless wanted  
 for some particular purpose  
 Rees' Cyclopaedia under the same conditions  
 All volumes of Tracts under the same conditions  
 Fielding's Works  
 Heine's Works  
 Voltaire's Works, excepting the *Henriade*, his histories & plays  
 Bolingbroke's Works  
 All Dictionaries except *Hedericus*  
 All books containing translations latin or english of the selections  
 in the *Collectanea* — and this to undergraduates of every class,  
 without an express order from Dr Popkin, or Mr Everett.  
 The *Philosophical Transactions*  
 Books of particular value — and books of prints.

This list is undated, but as Dr Popkin's term of service at the University came to an end in 1833, and Mr Everett's connection as an instructor came to an end in 1826, it must be before the latter date.

There were, however, toward the end of the period under review, some few signs of a more positive approach to the problem of the undergraduate. In 1841 a new catalogue of books for the Library of the Students was prepared in manuscript form, and two similar lists appeared in later years. Thaddeus William Harris, the Librarian, reporting on 11 July 1842 on the removal of books to Gore Hall, stated: 'A selection of books, for the special use & convenience of the students, was made, and deposited in the anteroom, together with manuscript catalogues of the same.'

Again, in 1845, the laws of the University relating to undergraduates contained the following additional and forward-looking statement:

The books most suitable for the use of Undergraduates shall be separated from the rest, and deposited in the Librarian's Room, where they shall be accessible to the students, and may be borrowed by them.

Books may also be borrowed from the general Library by the Students on application to the Librarian.

Finally, there may be quoted a paragraph from an article by Charles A. Cutter in the *North American Review*, October 1868, entitled 'Harvard College Library':

The library of to-day is not the library of thirty or forty years ago. The original restrictions on its use — restrictions made apparently in the interest of a remote posterity, from a fear that too much reading would wear out the books — are disappearing one by one, — gradually, lest with too sudden liberty should enter license. The doors are now open longer, the use of the books is facilitated by a better catalogue, both of authors and subjects, and by the personal assistance of a larger corps of attendants than ever before, or than in any other college library in the country. In fact, few libraries of any kind are more profuse in the aid which they offer to the student; in few are his inquiries directed and furthered with more zeal. Is it too much to ask of those who enjoy its privileges, that they do their part to augment its means of usefulness?

These are certainly indications that the undergraduate was not completely forgotten, and that he might look forward to better times in the years to come. The progress that was made from 1877 to 1937 will be recorded in the second article in this series, which will appear in the Spring 1947 issue.

KEYES D. METCALF



## List of Contributors

- KEYES D. METCALF**, Professor of Bibliography, Director of the Harvard University Library, and Librarian of Harvard College
- HAMILTON VAUGHAN BAIL**, Hartland, Vermont
- FRED N. ROBINSON**, Gurney Professor of English Literature, Emeritus, Harvard University
- PHILIP HOFER**, Curator of Printing and Graphic Arts in the Harvard College Library
- WILLIAM A. JACKSON**, Professor of Bibliography and Assistant Librarian of the Harvard College Library in charge of the Houghton Library
- ETHEL B. CLARK**, Honorary Keeper of Rare Books, Dumbarton Oaks Research Library
- CLIFFORD K. SHIPTON**, Custodian of the Harvard University Archives; Librarian of the American Antiquarian Society
- DAVID McCORD**, Honorary Curator of the Farnsworth and Poetry Rooms of the Harvard College Library, Executive Secretary of the Harvard Fund Council, and Editorial Chairman of the *Harvard Alumni Bulletin*
- I. BERNARD COHEN**, Instructor in Physical Science, Harvard University
- HAROLD S. JANTZ**, Associate Professor, Department of Modern Languages and Literatures, Princeton University
- WILLIAM H. BOND**, Houghton Library
- WILLIAM VAN LENNEP**, Curator of the Theatre Collection in the Harvard College Library
- JOHN H. BIRSS**, Assistant Professor, Department of English, University College, New York University
- HYDER E. ROLLINS**, Gurney Professor of English Literature, Harvard University
- ELMER M. GRIEDER**, General Assistant in the Harvard College Library