

MIRTHFUL MOODS OF A LIBRARIAN.*

Unlike those amusing creations of his fertile brain, Master Jared Bean, Dr. Matthew Gully, Master Peleg Gudger, Dr. Simon Bagley, and Master Enoch Sneed — all librarians of the old school — Mr. Edmund Lester Pearson, a librarian of the modern type, is endowed with a very lively sense of humor. In this he is by no means peculiar among those of his calling in the present day, and therefore his clever and sprightly sketches in "The Librarian at Play" will elicit not a few chuckles of amusement and delight on the part of learned bibliothecaries as well as on that of unlearned readers in general. In his literary and journalistic rôle as "The Librarian" of the Boston "Transcript," Mr. Pearson has attracted wide attention by the weekly exercise of his nimble wit and frolic fancy in the delineation of the eccentricities and perversities and comicalities to be met with in the library world. From these care-dispelling compositions of his playful pen the present selection of sketches has been made, with the exception of two articles — "Mulch" and "The Crowded Hour" — which now appear for the first time.

Better than further description of Mr. Pearson's book will be a few samples from its pages. A chapter entitled "The Conversation Room" amusingly presents the difficulties and distractions encountered by two scholars engaged in learned research at the Blankville Public Library. In despair at the impossibility of securing quiet for their philological studies within the library's precincts, these two savants address their complaints to the board of directors. Dr. Obadiah Wurzberger begins his letter thus:

"My name is doubtless familiar to you, but perhaps you are not aware that I am engaged in an important piece of research in your library. When I state that my work is an inquiry into the Indo-Iranian origins of the noun 'Fuddy-dud' and its possible derivation from the Semitic, you will understand that it requires the closest possible application and an entire freedom from interruptions and distractions. . . . The library, and particularly the remote part of it in which my alcove is situated, has been little frequented during this hot weather. Yesterday, however, an invasion began. The alcove next to mine was visited by a succession of incongruous, inconsequent persons whose conversation made it utterly impossible for me to work. A complaint to Miss Mayhew, the assistant in charge of the library, elicited the fact that conversation is allowed in this alcove."

* THE LIBRARIAN AT PLAY. By Edmund Lester Pearson. Boston: Small, Maynard & Co.

No other part of the building being found suitably lighted for the complainant, he attempted to continue his work where he was, but was forced to desist; and then, to fill in the time and to obtain an impressive exhibit to lay before the board of directors, he took down in shorthand the conversation of the frivolous disturbers of his peace. The record is highly amusing. A similar complaint, similarly reinforced, is transmitted to the board by Dr. Nicholas Jasper, who is engaged in the preparation of the first volume of his Arabic dictionary (on which he has been continuously occupied since 1867) in the alcove on the other side of the one where the talking occurs. No reader of the conversation reported by these two indignant scholars can refuse them his sympathy.

A personally conducted tour of the infernal regions brings the writer face to face with the edifying spectacle of the peculiar penalties inflicted on the various sorts of library-abusers. For example, of one group of sufferers he is told by his guide:

"These are the annotators, the people who work off their idiotic opinions on the margins and fly-leaves of books. They dispute the author's statements, call him a liar and abuse him generally. The one on the end used to get all the biographies of Shakespeare he could find and cover every bit of blank paper in them with pencil-writing signed 'A Baconian.' He usually began with the statement: 'The author of this book is a pig-headed fool.' The man next to him believed that the earth is flat, and he aired that theory so extensively with a fountain-pen that he ruined about two hundred dollars' worth of books. They caught him and put him in jail for six months, but he will have to take his medicine here just the same."

The "medicine" for each of these malefactors was a certain number of years' exercise in climbing barbed-wire fences, the number of years varying with the gravity of the offense. A glimpse also was obtained of the tortures to which "reformed spellers" are subjected in the kingdom of Pluto.

"They were busily engaged in clipping one another's ears off with large scissors. There was a sign on the hill beside them. It read: EARS ARE UNNECESSARY. WHY NOT GET RID OF THEM? LEAVE ENUF TO HEAR WITH. DON'T STOP TIL YOU ARE THRU."

Not a few old acquaintances, familiar to readers of "The Library and the Librarian" and of the "Transcript" articles, figure more or less conspicuously in the pages of "The Librarian at Play." The Ezra Beesly Free Public Library of Baxter is the scene of some amusing incidents in the book. Miss Pansy Patterson, assistant reference librarian, there wrestles with the various conundrums pro-

pounded to her; the voluble Mrs. Pomfret Smith tries to describe a book she wants, but whose title and author she has forgotten; and Mrs. Humphrey Mayo, with the aid of Mr. Reginald Kookle, ornithologist and author of "Winged Warblers of Waltham" and "Birds I Have Seen Between Temple Place and Boylston Street," labors at the identification of a feathered biped which she has caught a glimpse of in the shrubbery of her lawn and which finally turns out to be the *gallina domestica*.

Some bits of verse, both quoted and original, give variety to the book's contents. From Mr. Pearson's own pen we quote the beginning and the end of a two-page ode "To a Small Library Patron."

"Uncombed, a bit unwashed, with freckled face,
And slowly moving jaws — implying gum;
A decade's meager dignity of years
Upon your head — your only passports these,
All unconcerned you enter — Fairyland!

"For here dwell monstrous Jinn, and great birds fly
Through haunted valleys sown with diamonds.
Here Rumpelstiltskin hides his secret name,
The talking Flounder comes at beck and call,
The King of Lilliput reviews his troops,
The Jabberwock and Bandersnatch cavort,
And mice and pumpkin change to coach and four.

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"But you — with tawdled head and stockings torn,
Irreverent and calm and unabashed,
Intent on swiping Billy Johnson's cap —
You pass the magic portal unaware,
And, careless, saunter into lands of gold."

Most heartily is Mr. Pearson's book to be commended as a cure for that malady not so very uncommon among librarians, and not wholly unknown outside of libraries, — taking oneself too seriously.

PERCY F. BICKNELL.