

delves in the bowels of the internal combustion engine or makes a television set work; I am not talking of virtue in the conventional sense at all, but simply of the working of the human mind, for its own sake, the area where the pedant meets the artist. In the old days the great librarian, I fancy, my figure of romance, was this sort of pedant. Nowadays, I gather, implicit or explicit in the words of emissaries from America, the great librarian is a high-powered public relations man. Well, I suppose there is a sort of romance in that. The romantic view changes from generation to generation. Perhaps librarians have their own forms of romance. Some of them dream about books; some of them dream about computers.

Librarians: one could meditate a good deal about them, their types or individual characteristics: the scholar-librarian, the technician librarian, the public relations librarian, the education of librarians, the history of librarianship, the influence of the librarian on history, the comparative study of the contribution of the sexes to the art, science, and practice of librarianship, the charismatic (one must keep up with the language) librarian, the librarian as cosmic figure. I have studied the peculiarities of a number of librarians, and on the whole they seem to be an estimable race. I once had ambitions that way myself – romance again, you see; and one of my schoolmasters, a man of harsh voice and kindly soul, whom I admired greatly, whose name I still revere, must have thought I showed some promise. He asked me, ‘What are you going to do with your life, Beaglehole?’ I said modestly I didn’t know. ‘Well’, he said, you know a little about a lot of things and nothing much about anything; you might do quite well as a librarian.’ I thought he did a little injustice to the depth of my learning, but I was struck with his perception otherwise. I think my father had already explored the possibilities, however; he had consulted Mr Charles Wilson, the Parliamentary Librarian, a man of weight, and Mr Wilson had been discouraging. There was nothing in it at all, he said; and anyhow there were no jobs going. I have been puzzled by this since; because how many of my juniors managed to get jobs in libraries, and became eminent in the profession – parliamentary librarians and city librarians and national librarians and Turnbull librarians! Their fathers could not have consulted Mr Wilson. So my father got me a job in Whitcombe and Tombs instead, which was also romantic; and I must certainly have shown some promise as a bookseller, because at the end of a year my stipend was raised from 25 shillings, or \$2.50, a week, to 27s 6d, or \$2.75, and I was overcome with gratification. It was while I was in the shop that I encountered, rather remotely, Mr Wilson – rather remotely, for his conversation was reserved mainly for another exalted personage, Mr Cameron, the manager. Ah! if I could only give you an adequate picture of that 1918 Whitcombe’s, or of the bookshop further down