

Give a man a pipe he can smoke,  
Give a man a book he can read;  
And his home is bright with a calm delight,  
Though the room be poor indeed.

Very true. 'Sunday up the River' by James Thomson, 1869. Not *The Seasons* man. So you see there was an author coming into the shop, not only a librarian; and there was an added thrill. It was not quite Dr Johnson, but one makes do with what one has. It was at least Literary Authority. He republished a number of these articles a few years later, with the collected title – I am sorry if I give you a minor shock – *Rambles in Bookland*; and the volume being successful, followed it with *New Rambles*. Here I begin to suspect rather clayey feet: my father acquired neither of these volumes. Nor did I. Perhaps, as the century advanced, we were turning into intellectual snobs. Anyhow, I was a university student by then, deep in the *Athenaeum* and the *Times Literary Supplement*, and I had a different librarian before my eyes, the asthma-ridden, skull-capped, disciplinary, Greek-Testament-reading Horace Ward, the Reverend B. H. Ward, BA (LONDON) – whom the junior janitor, with mildly humorous hostility, would refer to as 'the reverend gentleman'. And a different library: minute, I suppose one would call it, but it had books, some of them out of the common run, it had the *Athenaeum*, it was a Cave of Enchantment. Horace Ward was not a great scholar; but sitting in the centre of it at his raised desk, he looked as if he might have been; he looked as if he might have edited the letters of Erasmus, or some early Christian Father. The right sort of librarian.

In the meantime something else had happened: a Great Event. The time was the last year of the war – the First World War – and all sorts of astonishing things were happening. I well remember standing in the bookshop – first floor, Educational Department – and gazing out of the window at the sky, and meditating, not on the imminent crash of empires, the trappings and the chaos of mankind, but on the news that Mr Turnbull had just died, and bequeathed his library to the country, or anyhow to the Government of New Zealand. And I remember romance taking charge again, and a great mark of interrogation confronting me in the sky that Wellington morning: should I abandon my career as a bookseller and become instead the librarian of the Turnbull Library? It was an attractive prospect, after Mr Wilson's discouraging comments; it seemed to indicate that there was some force in the Cosmos working for an ultimate justice. After an interval, however, I gathered that the question was not one that I should answer; neither the Prime Minister nor the Governor sent for me; and when the Fates, as cosmic instruments, finally made up their minds and impelled the