

Wilberforce Eames As I Recall Him

BY HARRY MILLER LYDENBERG

WILBERFORCE EAMES and the 26th day of June, a Thursday in the year 1896, stand together for me as I look back to him there on the platform in Sanders Theater when he was hailed by Charles William Eliot as a "learned bibliographer, especially in Americana, studious of the subject-division of all knowledge, and of the means of keeping accessible multiplying stores of knowledge."¹

The supremely, superbly, self-satisfied undergraduate, happily content with his own comprehensive, world-wide, complete indifference to such trivial performances as commencements, did then and there condescend to pay some attention to the great men on the platform; did as ever

¹ The title tells the story. This is neither a biography of Wilberforce Eames nor a bibliographical record of his work. It is nothing more than a trial effort to set down some of the traits of the man as they seem to stand out in the memory of one privileged beyond his merits in being able to work for and with him many years.

With characteristic fullness, accuracy, detail, Victor Hugo Paltsits gives as the first of *Bibliographical Essays: a Tribute to Wilberforce Eames* (1924) a record of his deeds and his published works. In the *Bulletin of the New York Public Library* for January, 1938, George Parker Winship gave a faithful and a moving interpretation of the man and evaluation of his contributions to scholarship.

Other tributes were paid by Joshua Bloch in number 35 of the *Publications of the American Jewish Historical Society* (1939); in the *Publishers' Weekly* (CXXXII, 2233); by Avery Strakosch in *Avocations* (I, 427-432). Oscar Wegelin, bookseller and bibliographer, painted the portrait of "Wilberforce Eames, Bookseller," in the *American Book Collector* (IV, 243-244).

The New York Historical Society unveiled the portrait of Eames painted for it by DeWitt M. Lockman, and presented to Eames its gold medal, on November 20, 1931, printing the proceedings on that occasion in a pamphlet of forty pages in 1932. The Bibliographical Society of America gave him its gold medal in 1929 (as noted in the *Bulletin of the New York Public Library*, XXXIII, 320), and the Bibliographical Society of London gave its gold medal likewise in 1929. In the *Proceedings of the American Antiquarian Society* for April, 1938, Dr. R. W. G. Vail paid his tribute to the man we all recognize gladly as master.

marvel at the wonderful voice and the commanding presence of the president; was willing even to note that this was the first time Harvard degrees were given in English.

Yes, he was willing to admit too that Eames stood in a worthy group along with John Muir, Thomas Bailey Aldrich, and Booker Taliaferro Washington to be named as Masters, the Doctorates being reserved for General Miles, Alexander Graham Bell, Nathan Webb, William Robert Ware, William Gilson Farlow, Wesley Otheman Holway, Minot Judson Savage, and John Heyl Vincent.

Mild interest was fitting for General Miles, of course; Aldrich had long been an agreeable companion with his *Story of a Bad Boy*, his *Marjorie Daw*, his other tales; all on the platform were undoubtedly worthy gentlemen; but for one undergraduate the top man there was marked by that slight, wiry figure, that grave but kindly face, that sober smile of appreciation for the honor done, the man whose name he had come to know at an admiring distance as the head of that wonderful though decidedly aloof institution founded by James Lenox.

The courteously attentive face was characteristic, I came later to know, admirably expressive of the man's inner nature, grave but undoubtedly full of interest for the problem at hand. It fitted the man. It reflected his nature, unassertive, positive, and unmistakable as to his position once he had taken his stand after due consideration, asking nothing more than the chance to follow the path he saw ahead, untiring and eager to help followers on the road, never with a thought of taking a single step to get for himself the richly deserved recognition as a leader that cheered his friends as later it came his way. Those traits I came to know better as time went on, happy but not surprised to find them in such a personality and character as when I first glimpsed that modest, unassuming figure.

So too, when I think of him I find myself wondering just what makes a man great, sets him off from his fellows, marks him as outstanding, as better in his own way than the rest of us? Oh, yes, the question and the problem are as old a query as man's first Why? Why? Why? They are quite as hard to answer today as when first posed.

Is it the tradition and inheritance from family and forebears? Is it the home conditions? The boyhood neighborhood? The schools and teachers? Is it something you recognize, admit as present, know is too intangible to be measured by size or weight or volume, but certainly stands out as to the result?

With Wilberforce Eames the family played without doubt an important if not dominant part. It was down-east stock from the district and state of Maine, the regular farming, schoolteaching, all around type, for several generations. His mother died before I knew him. His father taught school in various places in New England, was teaching in Newark, New Jersey, when Wilberforce was born on October 12, 1855. The family moved to East New York early in the boy's life, was saddened by the death of the other son, must surely have been solaced as it saw Wilberforce develop.

The father I remember well. No one could forget that sturdy figure, spare but strong, a little heavier than the son, sitting at the table, hour after hour, day after day, too deep in his Bible to note or care for the passing world. He would give a word of recognition, a greeting kindly but plainly an indication that more pressing and important matters call for his further attention, were close at hand. He must have eaten some time, but I never saw him take food. When or where he slept I know not.

Truth to tell, the one thing that mattered for me over there was the books, filling shelves, overflowing on to the floor, piled there or on anything else that would hold them.

I had already read Henry Stevens' *Recollections of Mr. James Lenox of New York and the Formation of His Library*, with the picture of the books in that home on lower Fifth Avenue: "The great bulk of his book collections was piled away in the numerous spare rooms of his large house, till they were filled to the ceiling from the further end back to the door, which was then locked and the room for the present done with."

Just how precisely accurate that is we know not. We do know that some such spirit ruled in the small frame house in East New York. To be sure, there were no "numerous spare rooms," nor were any rooms locked up. Lenox was gathering his books for future users. Eames was gathering his books for his own immediate use. Both were working for others. Eames lived with his books, used them too much, worked with them too much to think of locking them up. He knew what he had, where it was, could and would lay hands on it when needed. Shelves were three feet deep, books three rows deep on the shelves, piles often on the floor in front; but when a book was wanted no such inconveniences as being in a back row or at the bottom of a pile bothered in the slightest.

Luckily the windows and the roof were tight. I recall no damage by water or mice or such nuisances or pests. Yes, there was no supervision by housewife and of course there was dust. But, what mattered that! Dust did no harm so long as one let it lie. When a book came out into the open, it was dusted of course. A feather duster in the right hand, a book in the left, seemed the usual, the normal picture.

Home life was simple. Father and son went each his own way, quite willing, quite contented. The son got his own breakfast and then left for the day. When work at the library was over—the closing hour then was five (or was it

six?)—Eames and one or two others would stay to finish routine tasks or do their own reading. One “first” for Eames in those quiet hours was to go through the daily newspapers to note in Allibone or in *Appleton’s Cyclopaedia of American Biography* or other similar works the daily dates of deaths. He always had had too many problems and questions, thrust at him by readers or correspondence, to be finished amid daily interruptions of other readers in daylight hours. Such things must wait for the quiet of evenings. In earlier days he worked on Sabin, but Sabin was dormant when I came to know him. And in earlier days work had stopped as the day waned. Electric lighting had come in due course, but before that, much work must perforce have been done at home.

By eight or nine came time for bundling newly bought books to be taken home. With them under his arm came a brisk walk to the Third Avenue elevated station, a transfer at Brooklyn Bridge to the other system, half an hour more on that to Van Sicklen Avenue station in East New York, all this time given happily to dipping into some of the volumes going to their new home. I came then, when privileged to travel with him, to see the real bookishness of the man. First came a swift glance at the cover, next at the end papers, then checking the first and last leaves, careful fluttering of the whole to find any loose sheets, careful page-by-page collation, checking of maps and other inserts. By that time the physical book had been accepted or rejected or noted for further attention. It was no mere superficial scanning; more of the contents having been digested and absorbed by that time and under those circumstances than any ordinary mortal could hope for.

Books, books, books, there was no end, bought from auction catalogues, from dealers’ lists, wherever they were seen, from home and from the ends of the earth. Fred

Morris, that faithful agent and loyal soul, came to me more than once, genuinely distressed because he felt that Eames was buying beyond his means and he felt that "something must be done." Equally sympathetic, equally fond of our friend, we could but say finally that the man was prudent enough in other ways, and with such matters we could feel that as he had proven able to meet his other responsibilities with credit, here we could do nothing more than wish him well.

At home a neighbor came regularly for domestic duties, trained to do nothing with the books; they untouchable whether shelved or not. They were never to be moved or disturbed. On special occasions she would bring dinner, on Christmas or Thanksgiving for instance, when some of us on the staff would be favored with a home meal instead of the normal fare in boarding house or lonely restaurant. Many times was I asked over to help with the books. Looking back at it now I find myself wondering if that was not done more because of the man's kindly thoughtfulness than because of any real or lasting help I gave. Wonder too if perhaps I did not take unfair and unseemly advantage of the welcome I felt was so constant and sincere. Would that I then had had the balance to see it, or now could ask forgiveness or make atonement. I never saw or glimpsed anything but sincerely cordial welcome.

Such home life, such home habits, such surroundings must have had some influence, of course, but I doubt if the man's personality and characteristics can be explained in that way. Books there must have been in the house from his earliest days, but I never heard mention of any typical children's books, never saw any kept as boyish companions of fond memory. Gibbon and Rollin and Hume did come early, borrowed from a friend to help the boy work out his chronology of world history. Do we feel sorry that he never followed Tom Brown at Rugby or Tom Sawyer on the Mis-

Mississippi banks, never was instructed by travel with Rollo? Quite unmistakably he seemed content with his choice. Before his teens his mother took the boy way over to New York to buy at Gowan's bookshop Herodotus in English, probably the then new Rawlinson translation, he homeward bound rejoicing at his luck in having been able to save enough to own such a treasure. It was certainly an understanding mother to have supported and sympathized with the boy's heart's desire.

How much influence had the neighborhood? It was quite typical of East New York in those days, native American stock, working class or small tradesmen. I recall one family of goldbeaters, the constant pat, pat, pat of whose mallets was too steady and normal to call for attention or notice, no more than the rumble of the elevator in front of the house. Stop! It must have been an exception to find in such a neighborhood a family owning Hume and Gibbon and Rollin, kindly enough to lend the books to such a youngster. As to boyhood playmates or games I heard nothing, never a word about games or skating or circuses. No, nor did I ever hear a word to indicate anything but a normally happy, contented, comfortable boyhood life. Necessities enough to live on, luxuries from companionship with his chronology.

School influence? Yes, he did go early in life to a nearby "dame's school," and later to more advanced public schools, till close to his teens. "Reading, writing, 'rithmetic." Some of each, of course, but his reading must have been as typically his own choice as was the clear and economical handwriting he worked out for himself. It was essentially self-education from early days to the end of his life, constant, persistent, highly effective. Boy and man, he knew what he wanted—and he got it.

A real step in self-education came early in his teens when the chores for neighbors were followed by a chance to be

printer's devil, compositor, make-up man, pressman, folder, carrier, bill collector for the weekly *East New York Sentinel*. A neighbor, with his daughter, was editor, bookkeeper, proprietor. The insight into the making of books young Eames got thus stood him in good stead in later years, one more advantage he had over the average bookseller and librarian. Six months, however, were enough to teach the editor that the newspaper was not fated to give him food and shelter.

Came one more step in self-education when the *Sentinel* folded, two years' service as clerk in the East New York post office. The duty itself helped little, selling stamps at the window, carrying the mail pouch to and from the main office. However, it was indeed a real force in forming the future. After he took the local mail to the central office he had to wait till the return mail was ready. This often meant a long wait, and that waiting was done in Gillespie's bookshop nearby on Myrtle Avenue. The shop itself and its proprietor were an accepted Brooklyn institution, one more instance of how often we find bookmen welcoming Eames into their fraternity whether they make books, sell books, collect books, merely read books. Kind-hearted Gillespie willingly let the young postman wander around his stock, even let him carry his chronology farther by consulting the sixty-four volumes in the second edition (1747-66) of the *Universal History*. The dealer's reward came in his selling the set. Eames' joy and delight came in his buying the set. He took it home volume by volume, paying for it bit by bit the \$35 Gillespie charged him. This came after Gillespie took him on the staff, deducting the cost from the petty wages such a clerk got in such times.

I am not sure whether I saw the set at the house or merely heard Eames tell about it. I am sure I saw the translation of the Koran by Sale that Eames told me he had bought

both because he wanted the book and because he was interested in Sale for the part he had played in the *History*; am sure too that my introduction to the ingenious and notorious Psalmanazar came through Eames, who first told me about the gentleman as he showed me the *History of Formosa* and told of Psalmanazar's part in the larger effort. In our own days I came to wonder how much, if any, interest in this coöperative *Universal History* had been taken by the editors of the coöperative or institutional histories of countries or periods of literature we now know so well. The eighteenth century "age of enlightenment" is not without interest today.

I wonder too how many other copies of the *Universal History* could have been found in private libraries in our country in those days, just as I wonder how many sets of the printed catalogue of the British Museum would have turned up in libraries other than that of our Brooklyn post-office clerk.

Six years with Gillespie were followed by six more in shops of New York dealers, N. Tibbals & Sons, Henry Miller, Charles L. Woodward. Six more years of self-education, of profitable experience, of growing recognition by the book world. Tibbals specialized in religious books, the others ran mostly to Americana or general fields. The Tibbals firm sent him to sell books and periodicals at the summer camp meetings at Sing Sing (as the present Ossining was called then) and Ocean Grove. To most of us it would have been just one more part of the day's work, but to Eames it was one more step in self-education.

The Tibbals connection gave him a chance to show that he could do more than sell books over the counter. In the early eighties the English-speaking world took a much interest in the revision of the 1611 version of the Bible just then off the press, as in 1952 we did in the new revisions of

the revision. Eames's part is shown by a note in his characteristic handwriting in a volume of the New Testament in the New York Public Library: "This edition was published in 1882, when I was in the employ of N. Tibbals & Sons. . . . My work on it consisted in preparing it for the press by copying the marginal references and notes of the King James version and those of the revised version of 1881, together with the readings preferred by the American committee of revision, and in arranging them at the foot of each page." He was then twenty-seven years old.

Charles L. Woodward knew books as well as any of his competitors, was more of a character than some of them, gave an illuminating picture of himself and his outlook by the notes in his printed catalogues, now and then sharp enough to make the reader or the victim wince; a man never given to undue praise of authors, sellers, buyers. Crusty and outspoken, I remember how one day as the door closed on Eames, Woodward looked after his former assistant and said with affectionate shake of the head: "That man knows more about books than anyone else I know or expect to know. Why, if I had a bundle under my arm he could tell whether it bore a copy of the first or the second edition of Smith's *New York* or Burton's *Anatomy of Melancholy*. I never saw his like." From Woodward that spoke much.

These twelve years with the booksellers saw him not only selling books from the shelves but also buying books in the auction room for his employers, which gave him such an insight into the auction atmosphere and the prejudices and traditions of another side of the book world as is granted to few librarians or individual book buyers.

So too, these years, with those that followed, brought him in touch with such figures of the time as Dr. Samuel Abbott Green of the Massachusetts Historical Society, George

Philes and Luther Livingston, John Russell Bartlett and John Nicholas Brown, Henry Harrisse and Henri Cordier and Heli Chatelain, Garcia Icazbalceta of Mexico and Toribio Medina of Chile, the Ford and the Eggleston brothers, Henry R. Wagner and George Parker Winship, many, many others of widespread interests, of widely differing characters, but all with common interest in books.

It was while with Gillespie that he learned the fascination of the study of the languages of the American Indians, first through Thomas W. Field, then Superintendent of Schools of Brooklyn as vocation and busy with his Indian bibliography as avocation. The two worked together with increasing respect and with increasing profit as to command of their subject. This in turn led to Eames' beginning to collect in this field, and that next led to his knowing James Constantine Pilling, who was soon to bring out his *Proof-Sheets of a Bibliography of the Languages of the North American Indians*, in 1885, for the Bureau of American Ethnology. In his preface Pilling says this of Eames: "Almost from the beginning of the type-setting, the catalogue has had the benefit of his aid and advice. His thorough knowledge of the class of books treated, his interest in the subject itself, his fine library, rich in bibliographical authorities, his scrupulous care and accuracy with the minutiae which compose so large a part of a work like this, and his judgment in matters of arrangement, have all rendered his cooperation invaluable. The frequent mention of his name throughout shows but imperfectly the extent of my obligations to him."

Remember that this was said of a man just turned thirty, self-educated, able on the pittance of a bookseller's clerk to bring together a "fine library, rich in bibliographical authorities," and also to be named as a man of "thorough knowledge of this class of books." As the proof-sheets grew into the final volumes of eight individual families,

Eames played a characteristically important part. Look at the entries in the final Bibliographies by Pilling and judge how well Eames treated such names as Eliot, Mayhew or Meeker or Mather, Rawson or Quinney, Seargeant or Simerwell.

One more insight into the character and devotion of the man comes to mind in connection with the sale in December, 1882, of the O'Callaghan library, where this bookseller aged 27 had his friend Nash buy for him the Eliot Indian Bible and the four-volume set of John Russell Bartlett's catalogue of the John Carter Brown Library, one of fifty sets printed, the first to come on public sale. The two cost him \$244, plus the agent's commission.

Aside from the interest this copy of the Bible would have as an early purchase by Eames, its record of other owners is worth noting, at least for bookmen. Two inscriptions of 1728 and 1747 show probable use and ownership by Indians. Names of nineteenth-century owners begin with Judge Gabriel Furman, well known in Brooklyn and New York as judge of Brooklyn Municipal Court, as state senator, as historian and book collector. His library was sold in New York in December, 1846, Alexander Bradford, Surrogate of New York County, buying the Bible for \$11. When Judge Bradford's library was sold after his death, in March, 1868, the book brought \$95, going to Mr. Jaques, an executor of the estate. It then went through Sabin to Mr. John A. Rice, of Chicago, whose books were sold in New York in March, 1870, with Dr. O'Callaghan the buyer for \$120. Eames paid \$140 for it, and at his sale in 1910 the Lexington Book Shop got it for \$170.

The catalogue of the O'Callaghan sale notes "Psalms in Indian metre and Indian catechism" bound with it, also a long note in manuscript by Judge Furman. Eames took out these two, replaced in Bierstadt facsimile six-and-a-half

leaves missing in the volume as he got it, and then rebound the now textually complete volume.

We may not improperly stop for a moment to voice the pious hope the owner today appreciates the personal interest such a volume bears with it, as well as the meaning it has for linguistics and for the student of one way the New Englanders in their new home spread their message.

In this connection go back a moment and remember how Eames had borrowed from a neighbor a set of Gibbon to help with the chronology the boy then was making, this before his teens. I recall his telling me with amusement how this Gibbon had fired him with ambition and intent to get for himself the works of every writer cited or used by Gibbon. I am not certain just how far he got, but am certain that when I checked the footnotes of the first chapter of *The Decline and Fall*, the first ten of the fifty or so names stand out as Dion Cassius, Strabo, the elder Pliny, Abulfeda, Tacitus, Suetonius, Caesar, Pomponius Mela, Velleius Paterculus, Agricola. No pent-up Utica did the imagination of the boy Eames contain.

Two important things entered into his life in these two important decades. One was his connection with Sabin's *Dictionary*, the other his connection with the Lenox Library. Let us turn first to Sabin.

British-born Joseph Sabin came to this country in 1848, aged 27, set himself up as bookseller in New York and in Philadelphia, finally chose the former for his home, made a place for himself in the book trade. Soon after his arrival he began to note titles of books relating to America, and in January, 1867, brought out the first part of his *Dictionary*. By the time of his death, June 5, 1881, thirteen volumes had been published. No continuation of the work seemed possible, until in 1883 young Eames volunteered to take it over as a labor of love. Part 83 of volume 14 was his first, dated

1884. For the next eight years he put out others, but by the early nineties he came to see he could not keep it up, must choose between editing Sabin and doing his other work. Then came a long sleep. Thanks to a combination of interests, work on it was taken up once more under his direction and volume 20 came from the press in 1928. Progress then limped along until in 1936 *Laus Deo* could be written with part 172 of volume 29. Sabin died while work was in progress. Eames lived long enough to see the end of the exacting task to which he had given so much of his life's blood.²

Now to take up the Lenox Library part, recall that Eames was working in the middle eighties at the Woodward shop. There Dr. George Henry Moore, first Superintendent of the Lenox Library, noted the character of the young man, and took him in 1885 to be his personal assistant. Eames then

² There is no need here for a detailed story of the rise, the sleep, the final awakening of Sabin's *Dictionary*. It may be well, however, to give an X-ray print to show the structure. Thanks to the notes of Dr. R. W. G. Vail, the final editor of the work, we find the first word about it in the *Historical Magazine* of May, 1859, when Sabin published his "Prospectus of an American Bibliographical Manual" to be called "A Bibliographical Dictionary of all Books relating to America. From its discovery to the present time; also, of Books printed in the United States before A.D. 1800, with their current or approximate value." He said he had 15,000 titles then on hand.

On December 5, 1866, came out his "Prospectus" saying "After nearly four years' labor in arranging and classifying the material which had accumulated on my hands in the course of some fifteen years of research, I am at last able to publish the following specimen of my projected Dictionary of Books relating to America."

Hard upon that, in January, 1867, came the first part of Volume I; the volume being finished in 1868. Sabin died June 5, 1881, and until then the series had come along with fair regularity. When no one else seemed willing or able to pick up the torch, Eames stepped forward, volunteering to carry it forward with no other reward than the satisfaction of doing a worthy task. He must have begun sometime in 1883, his first part being Volume 14, part 83, dated 1884, beginning with Pennsylvania. Not one word did the *Dictionary* carry about the change of editors. Eames alone carried the series through volume 20, part 116, ending with Henry H. Smith in 1892.

Volunteer work on Sabin had to give way to the more pressing duties that faced Eames in the middle nineties, and for some fourteen years the work slept more or less quietly, not without calls that hoped for awakening, but all to no avail. In 1906, thanks to the interest of Dr. John Shaw Billings, the Carnegie Institution of Washington granted \$3,600, which Eames felt would be enough to whip the *Dictionary* into shape for printing, with no

had just turned thirty. In 1887 he went on the staff of the Library. Dr. Moore died May 5, 1892, and Eames then was made Assistant Librarian, later Librarian, a recognition of the work he had done in helping Moore organize the library, also of his possibilities for future development of such a special institution. He gave loyal and intelligent support to the aims of the founder, to the adapting of those aims and traditions to the changes in the times. Quite as keen for the care of the books as were Lenox and Moore, Eames was equally keen to help his trustees put those books to the service of the qualified public, aiming almost entirely at research in a few specially limited fields. The collection then had no general catalogue. "Contributions to a catalogue" had been printed for several years, good in themselves but far from giving fit covering for the entire library. Eames characteristically developed one of his pet ideas, the

revision nor attempt to bring the record up to date, using the copy then on hand, fairly satisfactory up to 1892, blind as to later publications. The grant was spent, and sleep once more took over. It had been hoped that money might be found to pay the cost of printing, being balanced by returns from deliveries. Paper dealers seemed unwilling, however, to wait for payment for paper stock, printers hesitant about donating their time, nor could other prepublication costs be met.

Eighteen long years drifted by, and then on December 24, 1924, came to the sleeper's eyes a ray of sunshine when the Carnegie Corporation of New York granted to the Bibliographical Society of America through the American Council of Learned Societies \$7,500. Once more did Eames take over, carrying the work through Volume 21, Part 121, with Miss Elizabeth G. Greene and Miss Marjorie Watkins as assistants.

He had come by 1930 to see a full-time editor was needed, and in that year, Dr. R. W. G. Vail stepped in as head with Part 122. With sincere reluctance, appeals for help had to be made to the Carnegie Corporation, and thanks to the interest and sympathy of Dr. Frederick Paul Keppel the work did finally sing *Laus Deo*. The total grants by the Carnegie Corporation came to \$38,500, made from 1924 through 1934.

Volume 29, Part 172, the last, was dated 1936. However, it did not appear until 1937 because money ran out as the year died, which meant that final reading of proof and other details had to come as a labor of love from Dr. Vail on nights, Sundays, other holidays.

Sabin's devotion and enthusiasm carried the flag from the beginning until his death, impoverishing him. Eames gave equal devotion with equal financial return, almost until his death. Vail finally brought it across the line with a record well entitling his name to joining the other two. Art is named a jealous instrument by Emerson. I wonder what he would say about *Madam Bibliography*?

The last volume notes kind friends who gave so generously of time and money and sympathy to help so worthy a cause along so thorny a path.

printed "short-title list," not entirely unknown but hitherto not used generally in this country, so far as I recall. In short order this alphabetical finding-list plan was applied to the greater part of the holdings. Soon began also one of the typical dictionary catalogues on cards. Hours of opening were lengthened, guides to the exhibition rooms put out, plenty of other liberalizing improvements developed.

Three years of steady, quiet, real progress followed. Use increased, friends increased, the need and the possibilities of such an institution shown and developed in encouraging fashion. Then in 1895 came a fundamental shift in position. Many friends of the Lenox Library, many supporters of its traditions, were sincerely distressed when on May 23, 1895, the Lenox Library joined with the Astor Library and the Tilden Trust to form the "New York Public Library, Astor, Lenox and Tilden Foundations." Time has proven the wisdom of the step. It was but natural, however, for readers and staff to look with deep interest, not to say with a certain amount of uncertainty if not fear, as they peered into the future.

The new Director, Dr. John Shaw Billings, had a long and distinguished career as librarian of the Surgeon General's Library in Washington, author of its *Index Catalogue*, engineer, statistician, scholar, and had recently retired from the Army to a post as professor at the University of Pennsylvania and director of the newly established laboratory of hygiene. It set back the university, but benefited the library world, when he agreed to take over the guiding of the new institution in New York. He began full-time work in 1896, but spent that summer as one of the American delegates to the conference called in London by the Royal Society that resulted in the birth of the *International Catalogue of Scientific Literature*, Billings naming Eames as Acting Director while absent.

On his taking up active work when he got back in September, Billings saw soon how loyal and able was the man he chose to head what then had come to be the Lenox branch of the New York Public Library, how appreciative of his ideals of public service was the spirit Eames instilled into his staff. Eames saw soon how competent and understanding was the new commander, exacting, to be sure, but quite as fair and considerate. It was for the staff a privilege as real as it was rare, a rich reward, full of inspiration and instruction, to see two such men adapt themselves to new conditions.

These "new conditions" had to be plastic, had to change from time to time, had to call for new approaches as new problems showed themselves or older problems took new shapes, but such things bothered neither man. It was natural for Billings to leave Eames to care for details at the Lenox building, Billings busy with the bigger plans and policies for the new institution. Eames worked loyally with his chief, respecting the man's command of the situation, the two in hearty accord as the plans for structure and administration of the new building at Forty Second Street and Fifth Avenue grew from drafting board to the opening of the new home in May, 1911.

In that new era and new building the main change as to Eames was in location of his work. He was in charge of American history, of the genealogical and manuscript and "reserve" collections. Billings died in March, 1912. Eames worked on as usual. In time, however, he was relieved of administrative duties, at first with no formal action, finally to his great satisfaction being named "Bibliographer" and set free to come and go, to do just as he pleased. He thus developed a fairly regular routine, stopping at the Pierpont Morgan Library, at the New-York Historical Society, at other congenial places. It let him give time and attention

also to such book lovers as Mr. Herschel V. Jones, advise about disposal of such collections as the Ogden Goelet books, plenty of other similar activities of real interest and appeal.

Good health had been his fortune for many years. Appendicitis did send him to the hospital, did give warning worthy of heeding. That led him to the Muldoon health farm in Westchester county, and that led to new strength, vigor, spirits. Long walks did their good. Vacations in the North Woods were taken with such friends as Mr. Henry F. DePuy, and with Mr. L. Nelson Nichols of the library staff. Characteristically he brought to this new interest some of the techniques he had developed in his library work. For instance, he long had used photography for his study of the history of printing and for identification of printers' types and works, comparing these prints from various copies with the originals or photographs at hand. His cameras went with him on vacation trips and resulted in such records as the pictures he took in 1915 on the waterways of Champlain and St. Maurice counties of Quebec, with typewritten text, mounted in five volumes now in The New York Public Library. It is slight, I admit, but it is charmingly characteristic of Wilberforce Eames.

In him was born a book lover, in him was developed a book collector. Interests included cuneiform tablets, oriental and western manuscripts, early printed books of Europe and the western world, the history of America, India, China, Europe, cartography, oriental and African and American native languages. This collecting was no helter-skelter piling up of books, no depending on a dealer, but the result of careful and discriminating study of the sources, followed by systematic cultivation on lines chosen after mature deliberation.

We have seen how the books grew in number at home. Newcomers were welcome. There came time, of course,

when choice must be made between finding other homes or making space in the old home. When the inflowing current threatened harm, relief came by sales at auction, sales by negotiation, gifts, his generous soul showing itself most notably by what he did in this last way.

From the childhood work on universal chronology to the very end, his knowledge of contents as well as of physical structure of books called forth amazement and admiration by all who saw him with his books or saw him working elsewhere with books.

I think of how people trusted him with treasures tangible and intangible, with their confidence and with their material possessions. One instance stands out in his connection with Heli Chatelain, as eager a student of native languages of Africa as he was a faithful and devoted missionary. He had inherited the Bible David Livingstone had with him when he died, faithful companion and so often his only spiritual food or mental pabulum. As Chatelain went back to Africa one time he asked Eames to hold the Bible for further instructions. Long this precious treasure was kept in the Lenox building, finally going to Chatelain's surviving sister in Switzerland. (I speak of this now, subject to correction in minor details, but confident the main picture is correct.)

The last years were comfortable; the end as placid as the earlier years had been uneventful (as the outer world looks on such matters). Honors came to him, were accepted with characteristic modesty, were of little effect in changing the daily routine, life with the books at home, visits to libraries, afternoons and evenings in his office at the library.

In his early eighties, he came to see the need of special medical attention. With sympathetic shake of the head and as gently as possible the physician wisely told him the truth, and advised a room in the Home for Incurables in the Bronx. He accepted the inevitable with his normal reserve, spoke

about it with characteristic objectiveness, busied himself in the hospital bed with the usual familiar tasks, reading, penning notes to friends at the library for things to be brought on the next visit. Pain and discomfort grew acute, but to the very end he showed the same fortitude and sweet, gentle, kindly, strong spirit that had guided him through so many useful and unselfish years, still led his friends to hope they might develop in themselves some approach to the spirit that was so strong in him.

The end came December 6, 1937; burial on the ninth in the Eames family plot in the Mt. Seir section of the Cemetery of the Evergreens, Bushwick Avenue, Brooklyn. A few friends stood by the grave. Some of them later, led by Victor Hugo Paltsits, joined on September 19, 1939, to set a black granite stone, polished, with circular ornament of bronze showing an open book and the lighted lamp of learning countersunk in the stone.

A sweet soul has left us, kindly, sympathetic, unselfish, modest, unassuming, poles apart from pushful aggressiveness or assertiveness or the like, a sturdy character demanding thoroughness and accuracy first in itself, generously confident of finding such ideals in others; a bookman through and through, from first to last. Books he collected not for selfish joy of possession of treasure, never with a thought of gloating over what he could show, rather and most emphatically with the purpose and the satisfaction of sharing with others what he found in those books, what message the writers wanted to give the world. Books for him came first of all, before everything else.

Yes, I hear you ask if the man had no blemishes? Not one redeeming fault? It looks like the portrait is overdrawn.

Set him against the rest of us and the blemishes are not easy to find. Limitations? Yes, certainly. He had little

interest in music or other forms of art—except as art is shown in the making of books. Companionable and attractive, respect-compelling, even endearing, he was scarcely the typical good mixer. An indoors man for most of his life, he did come in later years to enjoy the out-of-doors, his love of nature being more as the general picture than as particular scenes or specimens.

He was as calm and composed when faced by crises as when meeting daily routine tasks. I never heard him raise his voice, in protest or in applause, though each might be equally vigorous and unmistakable. I wished many a time I might hear him break loose, stamp his foot, pound the table, glare, blurt out one hearty oath—just to show that he could. Never once was that wish gratified. Yes, he had plenty of chances to set straight one ignorant, inexperienced, impetuous youngster where the boy had been wrong in judgment or in action. Reproofs and corrections were made with disarming firmness, clearness, finality. His protest against unfairness to others was stronger than against himself.

The better you knew him the higher did you rate him both as to attainments and as to the man himself.

[Mr. Lawrence C. Wroth added the following remarks on his experiences with Wilberforce Eames in Providence:]

It is possible that the only daily newspaper in the country which carried an article about Wilberforce Eames on the occasion of the 100th anniversary of his birth was the *Providence Journal* for October 12, 1955. This article, repeated the same day in the *Providence Evening Bulletin*, was written by our fellow member, Mr. Bradford Swan, who long ago realized that Mr. Eames, an honorary Litt.D. of Brown University and a long-time member of the Visiting

Committee of the John Carter Brown Library, was part of the Providence literary tradition, and that in its turn Providence was an element in the Eames legend.

The Visiting Committee of the John Carter Brown Library was for many years a distinguished group. Members came and went but the backbone of it for several years was the continued membership of three great bookmen, Matt Bushnell Jones, Grenville Kane, and Wilberforce Eames. Mr. Jones and Mr. Kane came to those annual meetings on Washington's Birthday as humble pupils of Mr. Eames, the gentle, unpretentious man whom they revered as a great collector and a learned bibliographer.

Mr. Eames came to Providence each year on February 22 by a train which arrived at about six A.M. The Providence car was put on a siding and passengers were allowed to stay aboard until eight, but that concession to human weakness was never taken advantage of by Mr. Eames. He was ready to get off the train as soon as it stopped so that he might have his daily four-mile walk before breakfast. Years ago when he was in the early flush of bibliographical encounter with Captain John Smith he discovered that Providence possessed a Smith Street. Thereafter every year he took his hour's walk out Smith Street, as uninspiring a street as he could have found by careful search throughout the world. None the less he liked it and always remarked upon buildings newly put up since the year before and upon its gradual further extension into the country to the westward. Then at seven-thirty he would go to the Biltmore where I would meet him for a sound old-fashioned breakfast. It was a genuine triumph when after years of a procedure highly disturbing to my routine, I was able to persuade him to come instead to my house for breakfast. Mr. Paltsits and others of his friends in New York did not believe this to be true. He hadn't been in a private house except his own for untold

years. It should go into the record here that somewhat later than this he not only visited Mr. Streeter at Morristown, but stayed the night. (I may interpolate at this point that I have never believed the legend which said that in his own old Brooklyn house he was compelled to sleep in a hammock because all his beds had become covered up and snowed under by the steady accumulation of books.)

Once at the Library the business of a vigorous day began. Mr. Eames always had ready for us a list of the books he wanted to see. Without waste of words or motion he sat down to copy on his 5½ by 8½ inch slips, full titles and imprints, collations, and, sometimes, long passages of texts. Each of these slips was done in his clear, firm writing, carefully and with an appearance of leisure which suggested that he had months before him for the task instead of hours. If he was interrupted by the arrival of the other members of the Committee he laid aside the slip he was working upon for completion on the next Washington's Birthday. I think he never made a hasty note in his life, never jotted down something on the back of an envelope or on a casual scrap of paper. What he put down became immediately a permanent part of whatever record interested him at that moment. How many thousands of these slips, each one a perfect bibliographical record, he left behind him will probably never be known.

The recollection of this procedure brings me to another consideration connected with his work. The printed result of his ceaseless labor was relatively small. About thirty substantial titles, including the six volumes of Sabin which he edited, but excluding reviews, brief notes, and prefaces, would cover the output of his life after his first original study at the age of thirty. Each of these, however, was what I once described as "a perfect statement." In speaking recently of his Vespucci bibliography I could find no

better word to describe it than "immaculate." But still, despite its perfection, the bulk of his writing throughout a period of more than fifty years does not impress those who know him only by that record. Others of us know that one chief reason for his relative lack of productivity was that with complete selflessness he was generally doing research in response to our own frequent demands and embodying the results of it in the letters that came ceaselessly from his pen, and I mean "pen," not typewriter. And what letters they were! The hundreds of Eames letters in the John Carter Brown Library, for example, go back to the early eighties and carry through until his very last years—a sustained correspondence with John Russell Bartlett, John Nicholas Brown, the Elder, George Parker Winship, Worthington C. Ford, and myself. Our Eames letters form one of the foundations of the Library's chronological bibliographical file, a chief source of the information in which we deal. How many other institutions can say the same, I don't know, but I am sure that Mr. Brigham will agree with me that in his files here in Worcester and in ours in Providence, and in those of many another library are to be found the true "works" of Wilberforce Eames. I am glad to say that in his later years he took a holiday from this daily giving of himself to others. Once when I asked him whether he had received a letter of inquiry I had written him a month earlier he replied with the utter candor at which no one can take offense, "Yes, but nowadays I do not reply to letters unless they interest me." I am wondering at what age one may properly begin to regulate one's life upon that principle.

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