

CORRESPONDENCE

4th November inst. 1999

My dear Editor,

Forgive me for resorting to the Nether Ether¹ for this communication. Scandalous things were said of Mme. Blavatsky and her followers before I was even a dimple in my mother's cheek (well, almost before then, but I've never corrected that little mistake on my library school and Library of Congress application forms), but actually, I have grown quite fond of the Great One over here, as she lends me her shawl when it gets chilly, buttressed as she is by a bit more *avoirdufois* than I ever possessed. I resort to this medium only because Mr. Gates' highway is glutted with vulgar commerce and lucre, and my previous missives have been inexplicably devoured by something called a "black box," and never reached you.

I hesitate even entering this mortal fray again, as I'm supposed to be quite beyond the vale of care, but you should know I do take note of your publication, even here. And when Miss Colleen—would that be the Irish Colleens²—of the Westminster Kennel Club makes such a spectacle of renouncing her subscription to *LQ* simply because of minor artistic liberties taken with a defenseless little dog in a bookplate, and then has the temerity to accuse you of fraud (*LQ* 69 [October 1999]: 543), why, Miss Wallace, Mrs. Sneed, Miss Chapman and I all agree that this sanctimonious folderol must be stopped dead in its tracks.

Part of the problem is, of course, that Miss Colleen obviously hails from the Continent, and of course, females of the species do not enjoy the degree of professional respect there that they do in the so-called former Colonies. They are all but ignored in the Library Association; one has to be an intellectual like the Mitford girls, Byatt, Brookner, Murdoch, Drabble et al. to attract a serious stake in discussion. Second, Miss Colleen's obviously dyspeptic humor, no doubt a result (if my experience with one dour and ill-tempered representative of her countrywomen in the class of 1907 is any indication) of that predilection for acerbity noted by one authority on single ladies, namely, "qualities which never fail to render their unhappy proffeffor [*sic*] an object of abhorrence [. . .] [*viz.*] envy and ill-nature."²

Of course, Molesworth Institute has an obvious penchant for things across the ocean, even if St. Custard doesn't always distinguish between ladies and char-ladies, but South of the Mason-Dixon, we never had Irish servants, and I can't say anyone in my native Chattanooga would have particularly remembered the Lions Club in their testamentary bequests. When Miss Rankin went to the Brussels conference in 1908, she found the relative scarcity of professional women singular, and I had to agree. That's not how we do things in America. When Mr. Putnam wanted something done, and done right, he turned it over to me!

1. Phone-calls, Spirit. See Spirit Phone-calls.

2. William Haley, *Essay on Old Maids*, 3 vols. Third ed. with additions. London: Printed for T. Cadell, in the Strand, 1793, I, 84.

What we would like to say to Miss Colleen is, lighten up, girl! Try sugar instead of vinegar, lose those scratchy tweeds and those beige brogans and sparkle, honey! Sparkle! Miss Richards, who has just joined us here from New Jersey, has had us in stitches with stories about the stolid European scholar-ladies she met at IFLA, and they serve a cautionary note. I must add that Miss R. displays more of her lower extremities than most of us have seen in our own bedroom mirrors, and oh! What limbs! Oh, I know—one thought we were all stuffy. Well, there's a photograph somewhere in the Urbana archives of Miss Hewitt and Mr. Dana gazing at each other across a porch railing at one of those nice woodsy ALA conferences that took place by a lake with one of those unpronounceable Indian names, and what is passing between their eyes isn't salt! All that silly talk about Mr. Dewey—or Dui, if you prefer. None of us paid him any attention. He was brilliant, of course, but an absolute bore, and no one you could bring home to your mother—rather pathetic, really. As for Miss Plummer—well, look at her photograph! Doesn't she just wish some impropriety had been attempted! She was, one might say, *disappointed*, and was rumored to spend most of her time erasing salacious marginalia from the novels of E. P. Roe and Mrs. Southworth while never forgetting a word of what she had consigned to ignominy. But not us: we had fun! Virginia reels on St. Patrick's Day in the Reading Room, teas and moving pictures during exam week, ghosties and goblins on Hallowe'en—now outlawed, I understand, by the latter day descendants of C. of E. forbears who regularly burned Guy Fawkes in effigy—people without Miss Colleen's unforgiving temperament, obviously-hiding *Chambers' Book of Days* from our reference librarian during Christmas week when all the mothers came to the library looking for the origins of Christmas customs—oh, it was grand, I tell you! What has happened to our precious silliness? All this fuss about a bookplate! Like the recent tempest about a book called *Dutch* (such a sweet name, really, one can almost picture his wooden shoes, the rosy cheeks, the tow head in a Buster Brown page-boy cut, with his copy of Uncle Remus in hand), written by an exhausted author about a man who happened to be President—a man cute enough to be elected President by any account, but my dear, his syntax!

Go back to your dogs, Miss Colleen, we don't want you! Librarianship was never about *accuracy*. Who ever said it was? It is about *meddling* (in bookplates, grandmothers' trunks and scrapbooks, and the licentious and racy pamplisest of the ages!). It is about *muddling through* seventeen thousand revisions of authority files and cataloging rules and . . . oh, dear I'm fading, I knew I shouldn't have mentioned sex, politics, and religion, I have to go now. Farewell! (Or is it Falwell? My signals are crossed!)

For God's sake, lighten up! Colin Powell as ALA speaker? \$70,000—are you mad?!

Respectfully yrs,

Sarah Louisiana Manypenny (via medium)
Class Agcnt, '06; *The Southern Library School*