

VIEW FROM THE CAPITOL, SHOWING THE MAIN FRONT OF THE LIBRARY.

THE NATION'S LIBRARY.

BY THE LIBRARIAN.

WITH PICTURES BY E. POTTHAST.

I. THE NEW BUILDING.



A CONSOLE, MAIN VESTIBULE.
HERBERT ADAMS, SCULPTOR.

THE monumental building provided for the extensive collections of the Library of Congress at Washington represents about nine years of construction, besides fourteen years of preliminary agitation and discussion. The act of April 15, 1886, authorizing the erection of a separate library building was the fruit of a public necessity growing out of the rapid increase, beyond all capacity within the Capitol to hold them, of the nation's books. Several proposed measures for this end had been postponed from year to year by interests deemed more important or more pressing, or by differences concerning a proper site, plan, and cost, until the act referred to secured fully two thirds of the votes of both houses of Congress.

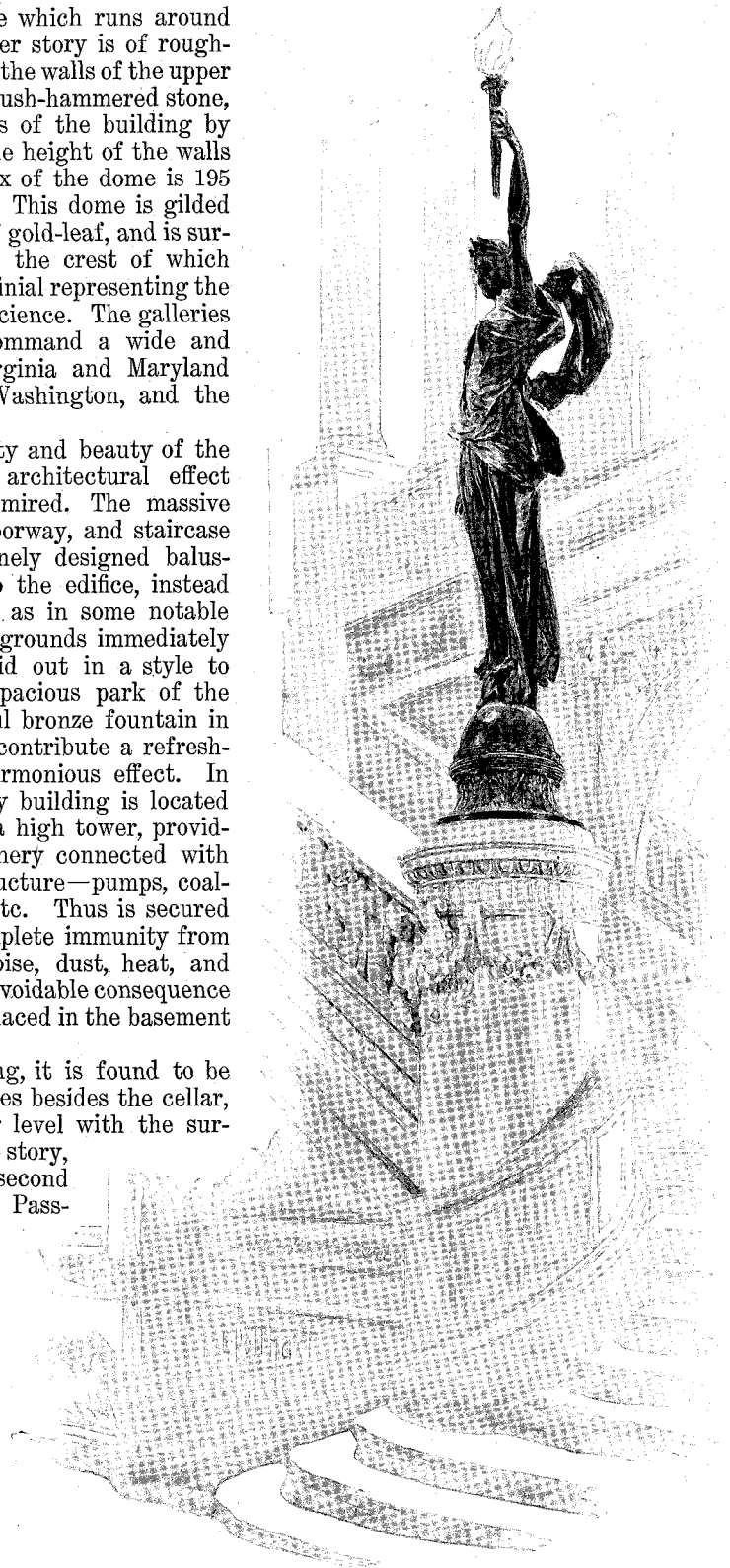
The site selected was an ideal one in respect to elevation, salubrity, and dry, solid foundations for a massive edifice of granite. It abuts upon the park of the Capitol, being about 1500 feet distant from that building on the east, and it is surrounded by four streets with ample approaches. The white

granite which forms the exterior walls of the building is from quarries in Concord, New Hampshire, and in color is nearly as light as the marble walls of the Capitol. The inner walls, facing the four spacious courts, are in part of a slightly darker granite from Maryland, and partly of white enameled brick resembling porcelain in color, and producing a light and cheerful effect. The dimensions of the library building are 470 by 340 feet, covering about three and a half acres of ground. In style the building belongs to the Italian Renaissance, and four corner pavilions, together with the central front, are moderately projected, completely relieving any monotony incident to so long a façade. The solid and massive granite walls are further relieved by many windows, the casings of which are treated in high relief, and by sixteen ornate pillars and capitals in the central front, with twelve columns in each of the corner pavilions. In the keystones of thirty-three window arches are carved in the granite thirty-three human heads, representing types of various races of men—a unique feature, furnishing an object-lesson in ethnology as well as in decoration. Four colossal figures, each representing Atlas, are carved below the roof on the central pavilion, surmounted by a pediment with sculptured American eagles, and an emblematic group in granite. Three spandrels, carved in granite above the arches of the three main entrance doors, represent Art, Science, and Literature. The whole edifice is surmounted

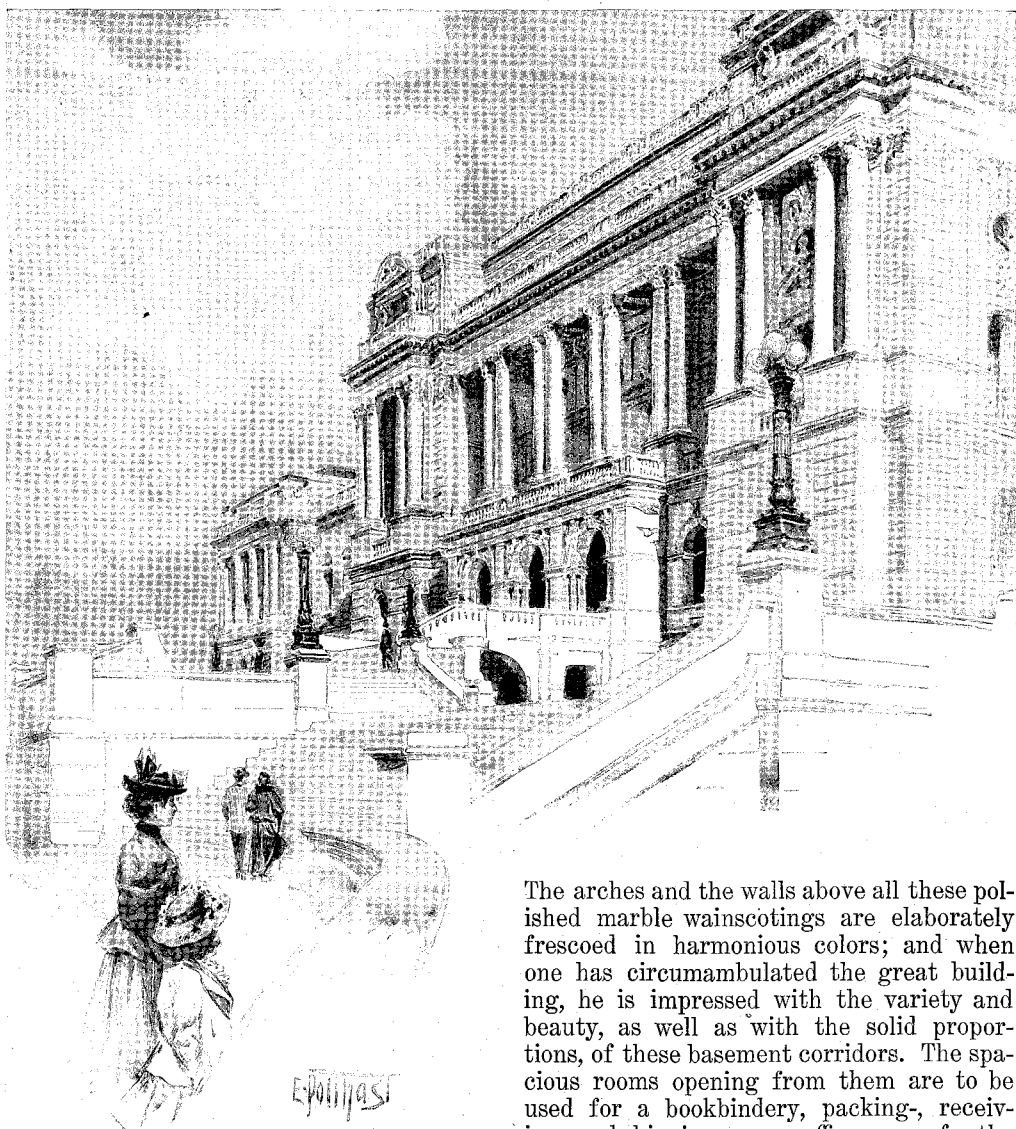
by a carved balustrade which runs around the building. The lower story is of rough-surfaced granite, while the walls of the upper stories are of smooth bush-hammered stone, relieved at the corners of the building by vermiculated work. The height of the walls is 69 feet, and the apex of the dome is 195 feet from the ground. This dome is gilded with a thick coating of gold-leaf, and is surmounted by a lantern the crest of which terminates in a gilded finial representing the ever-burning torch of Science. The galleries of the upper story command a wide and noble view of the Virginia and Maryland heights, the city of Washington, and the river Potomac.

The combined solidity and beauty of the exterior produce an architectural effect which is generally admired. The massive granite approaches, doorway, and staircase with its heavy but finely designed balustrades, lend dignity to the edifice, instead of detracting from it, as in some notable public buildings. The grounds immediately surrounding it are laid out in a style to correspond with the spacious park of the Capitol, and a beautiful bronze fountain in the central front will contribute a refreshing adjunct to the harmonious effect. In the rear of the library building is located a granite annex with a high tower, providing for all the machinery connected with the heating of the structure—pumps, coal-vaults, steam-boilers, etc. Thus is secured within the library complete immunity from those nuisances of noise, dust, heat, and odors which are the unavoidable consequence when such plants are placed in the basement of any public building.

Entering the building, it is found to be divided into three stories besides the cellar, namely, a ground floor level with the surrounding streets, a first story, or library floor, and a second story, or gallery floor. Passing into the basement under heavy groined arches, the ceilings of which are frescoed in simple designs, we enter one of the four long, spacious corridors which extend all around the building. The feature of all these wide passageways is that they are wainscoted or are lined entirely



BRONZE LAMP-BEARER OF THE GRAND STAIRCASE. PHILIP MARTINY, SCULPTOR.



CENTRAL PAVILION, SHOWING MAIN ENTRANCE.

with American marbles coming from three different States, and embracing the handsomest colored marbles which this country produces. The western corridor (nearest to the Capitol) is of two shades of mottled blue Vermont marble from quarries at Brandon. The south wing is lined with what we may call Champlain marble, from the Swanton quarries near that lake, a very rich red-and-white stone, most effective to the eye. In the eastern corridor (360 feet in length), a Georgia marble from Pickens County, in black and white veins, has been used with beautiful effect. Finally, the north wing is lined with Tennessee marble of a light chocolate color.

The arches and the walls above all these polished marble wainscotings are elaborately frescoed in harmonious colors; and when one has circumambulated the great building, he is impressed with the variety and beauty, as well as with the solid proportions, of these basement corridors. The spacious rooms opening from them are to be used for a bookbindery, packing, receiving-, and shipping-rooms, office-rooms for the heads of the watch and superintendence of the building, and for storage purposes.

Ascending to the first or library floor, which is also entered from the outside by the granite staircase and bronze doors, the vestibule is reached, through which, decorated elaborately with white marble and gilded ceiling, one enters the foyer, or grand staircase hall. This superb apartment is constructed throughout of the finest Italian marble, highly polished. From its four sides rise lofty rounded columns with Corinthian capitals richly carved, and its heavy but very graceful arches are adorned with marble rosettes, palm-leaves, and foliated designs of exquisite finish and delicacy. The lofty height of this fine entrance-hall, rising 72

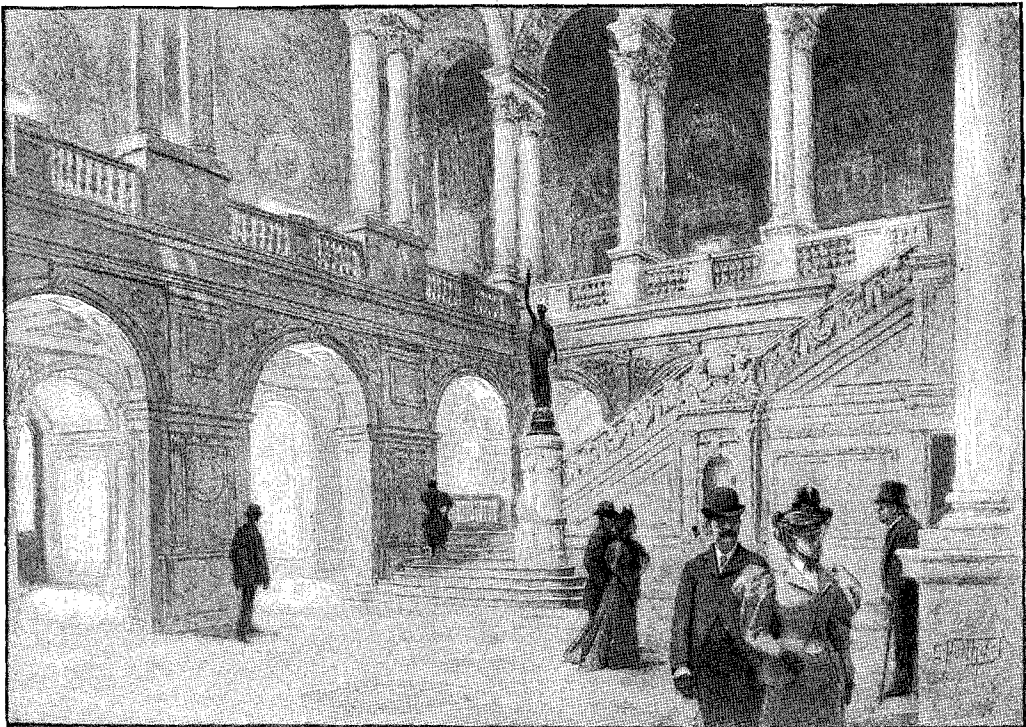
feet to the skylight of stained glass, with its ornate vaulted ceiling and grand double staircase, and its white marble balustrades leading up on each side to the galleries above, produces an architectural effect both harmonious and imposing. It has been styled «a vision in polished stone» and «a dream of beauty»; but only readers who have seen it can be expected to appreciate such terms of praise.

Entering through this spacious hall, we pass into the reading-room, or central rotunda, by wide corridors adorned with rich mosaic ceilings. This public reading-room is octagonal in shape, with a diameter of 100 feet, and is lighted from above by eight large semicircular windows 32 feet wide, bearing the arms of all the States and Territories in color. At intervals eight massive pillars rise to the height of 40 feet, their bases being of dark Tennessee marble surmounted by heavy columns of lighter red Numidian marble, and crowned by emblematic statues of heroic size. The wall-space of the reading-room is of yellow Siena marble, with numerous arches and balustrades rising to the height of the upper gallery in a double tier, and having an extremely rich and beautiful effect. There are in all seventy-seven arches, the lower tier being intercalated with pilas-

ters and architraves carved in classic sculpture. All these beautiful architectural effects are embodied in that richest of all known colored marbles which comes from the quarries of the Siena monastery, and their soft, warm, and mellow lights and shades are a pleasure to the eye.

The reading-room is fitted with mahogany desks for about two hundred and fifty readers, allowing each four feet of working-space. In the center, slightly raised above the surrounding floor, are the desks of the superintendent and his assistants, with the card-catalogue of the library in a long series of drawers grouped about the inner circle, while the circular shelves outside the railing provide readers with an assortment of catalogues, bibliographies, and other works of reference to be used freely without the formality of tickets. Within this central desk-space, which commands every part of the reading-room, is an extensive series of pneumatic tubes communicating with the several stack-rooms in which books are stored, and there is to be introduced a system of book-carriers for the speedy service of books to readers from any part of the outlying book repositories.

Opening out from the central reading-room on each side are two extensive iron book-stacks, each of the capacity of about



THE GRAND STAIRCASE HALL, OF CARRARA MARBLE.

800,000 volumes. These stacks are nine stories in height, each tier of shelves being just seven feet high, and each stack rising 65 feet, tier over tier, to the roof. All the floors are of white marble, and every book can be reached by the hand at once. The shelves are made of rolled steel, not solid, but in open bars, very light and firm, and so coated with magnetic oxid as to render them as smooth as glass. The space between the bars secures ventilation for the books, as well as immunity in a good degree from accumulations of dust. They are adjustable by an easy movement to any height for books of various sizes. This shelf system and stacks were designed by Bernard R. Green, engineer in charge during the construction of the building. The book-stacks are lighted by windows of plate-glass without sash, each window being a single plate, and dust-proof, the ventilation of the stack-rooms being from the upper tier of

windows, on the down-draft system. Three elevators are provided for the three stack-rooms, and three for public use in other parts of the library building.

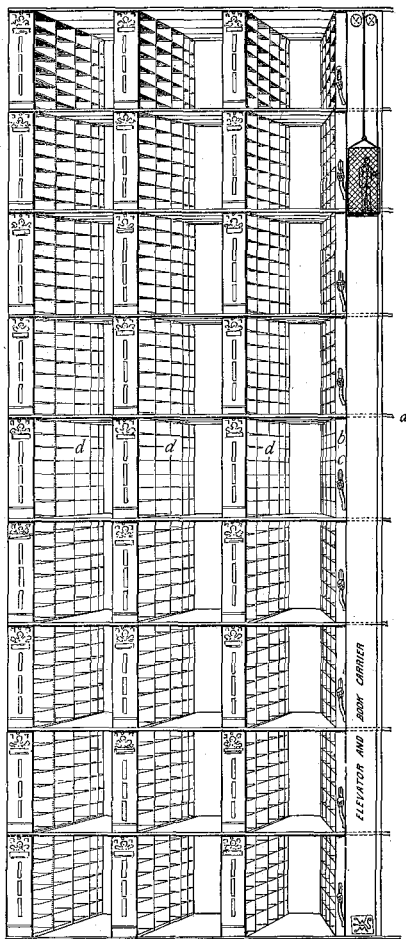
The spacious rooms on the first floor, outside the central reading-room, are designed for the copyright office, or public records, a catalogue-room, a special reading-room for the Senate, and another for the House of Representatives, an apartment for the Toner Library (presented to the Government), committee-rooms, librarian's office, etc. The Smithsonian Scientific Library, long deposited with the Library of Congress, will be placed in the smaller stack-room on the eastern side of the building, which will hold about 100,000 volumes.

The second floor of the building has four spacious open corridors surrounding it, decorated as to walls and ceilings with frescos and mural paintings, and with numerous tablet inscriptions from the great writers of the world. It contains an extensive hall designed for an art gallery, a hall for maps and charts, and three or four spacious exhibition-halls in which choice specimens of early typography, engraving, and Americana will be exhibited in glass cases.

The capacity of those portions of the library building already shelved is ample for about 1,900,000 volumes, there being about forty-four miles of shelves in position. Beside this, there is space which may ultimately be finished with book-stacks to accommodate about 2,500,000 additional volumes; and the extensive inner courts may still further serve posterity for book storage to the extent of 4,000,000 to 5,000,000 volumes more. When it is considered that the largest existing library numbers less than 2,500,000 volumes, it will be seen how extensive is the provision for future growth for at least a century or two to come.

An underground tunnel between the Capitol and the library building will transmit rapidly any books wanted for congressional use and not found in the reference library at the Capitol.

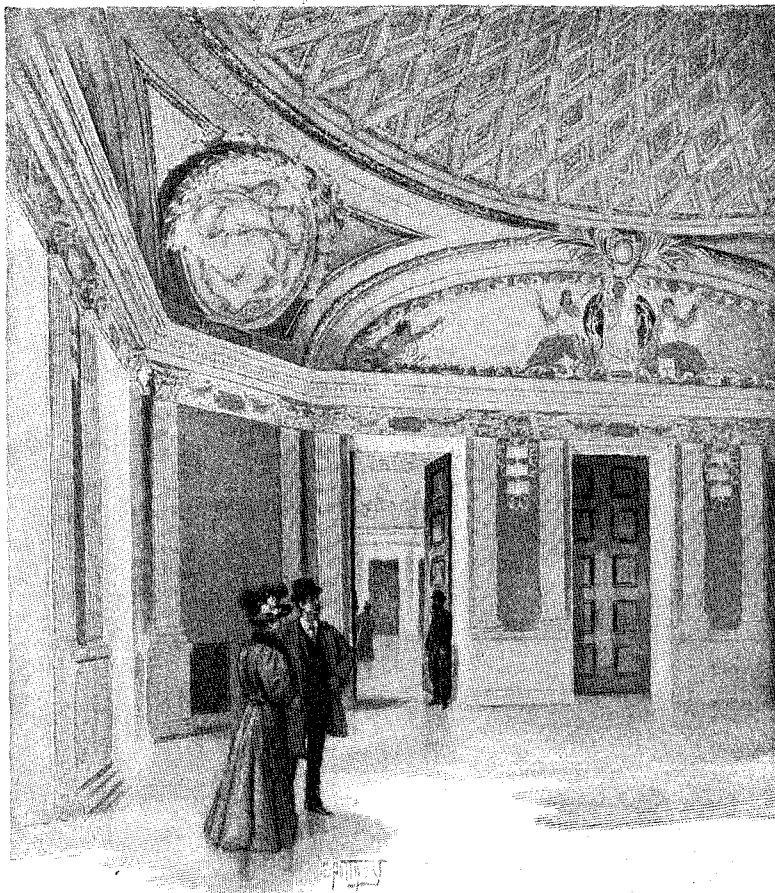
The floor-area of the library in its first story is about 111,000 square feet, that of the British Museum being a little more than 90,000 square feet, and that of the building for the State, War, and Navy departments 92,000 square feet. The ultimate cost of the entire edifice, including decorations and furnishings, will be about \$6,300,000, or a little more than half the cost of the government building last named, and it will be completed within the limit of cost fixed by Congress.



DRAWN BY WELLS M. SAWYER.

A BOOK-STACK.

a, flooring; b, pneumatic tube; c, carrier; d, shelves.

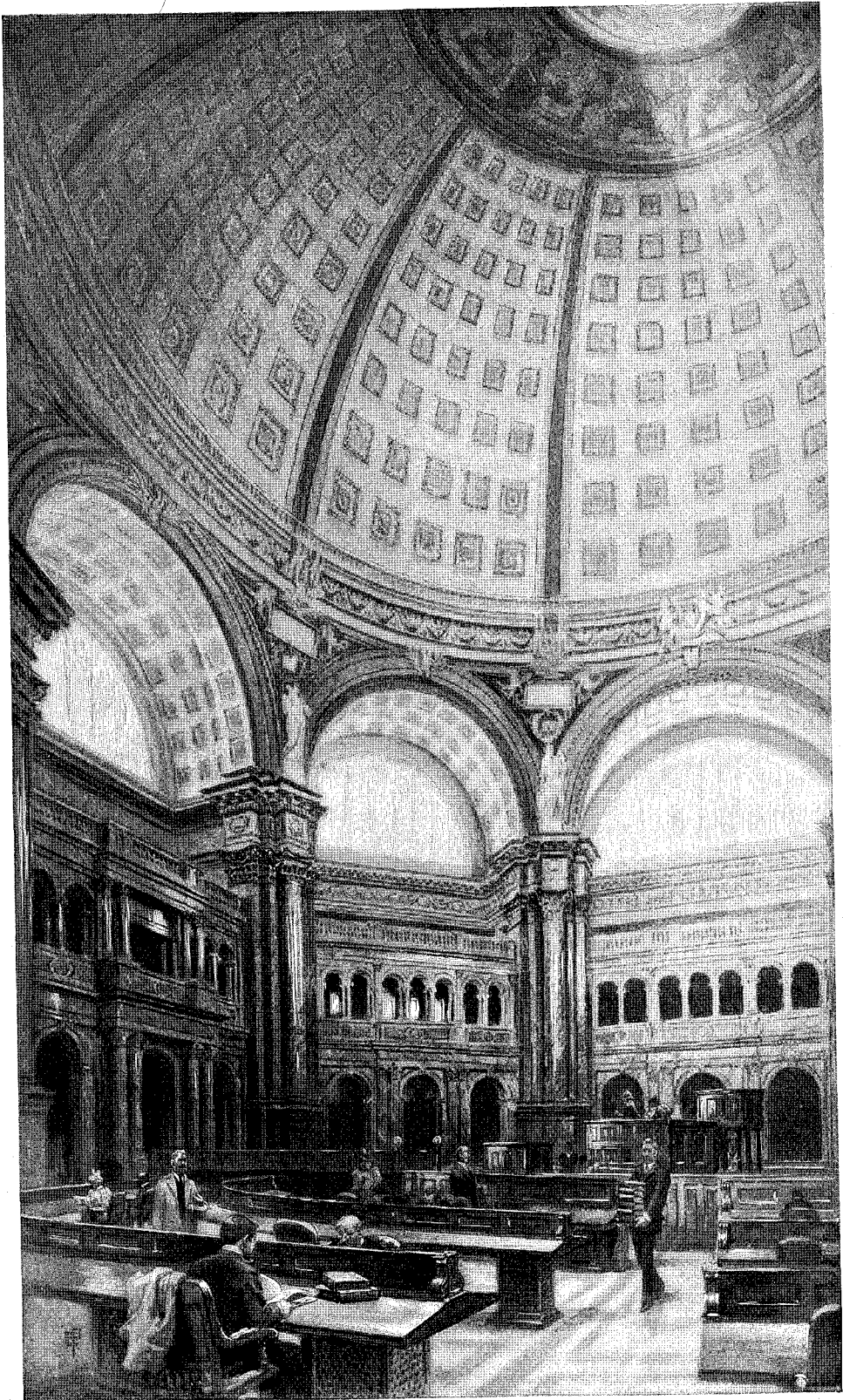


SOUTHWEST PAVILION—THE EXHIBITION-ROOM.

In design and in construction the two great ends of architecture, use and beauty, appear to have been well attained in this government building, a structure erected not for the present generation alone, but for many yet to come.

II. SPECIAL FEATURES OF THE CONGRESSIONAL LIBRARY.

WHAT is the function of a government library? is a question which becomes more than ever pertinent in view of the impending opening at Washington of the noble building to which this article is devoted. That this edifice is a permanent, fire-proof, and fitting home for the nation's books, representing the assiduous gatherings of nearly a hundred years, is already recognized by all. That the mission of the great library which it is to contain is a manifold one, reaching far beyond the limits of its locality and the present age, is perhaps less widely appreciated. Founded in the year 1800 by the modest appropriation of five thousand dollars «for the purchase of such books as may be necessary for the use of Congress at the said city of Washington,» this collection has grown, notwithstanding the ravages of two fires, to the present aggregate of 740,000 volumes. The acquisition of the Jefferson Library in 1815, the Force Historical Library in 1865, the Smithsonian Library in 1867, and the Toner collection in 1882, all constituted specially important and valuable accessions to its stores. And by the enactment of the copyright law of 1870, followed by the international copyright act of 1891, this library



THE PUBLIC READING-ROOM.

became entitled to receive two copies of all books, periodicals, and other publications claiming the protection of copyright in the United States.

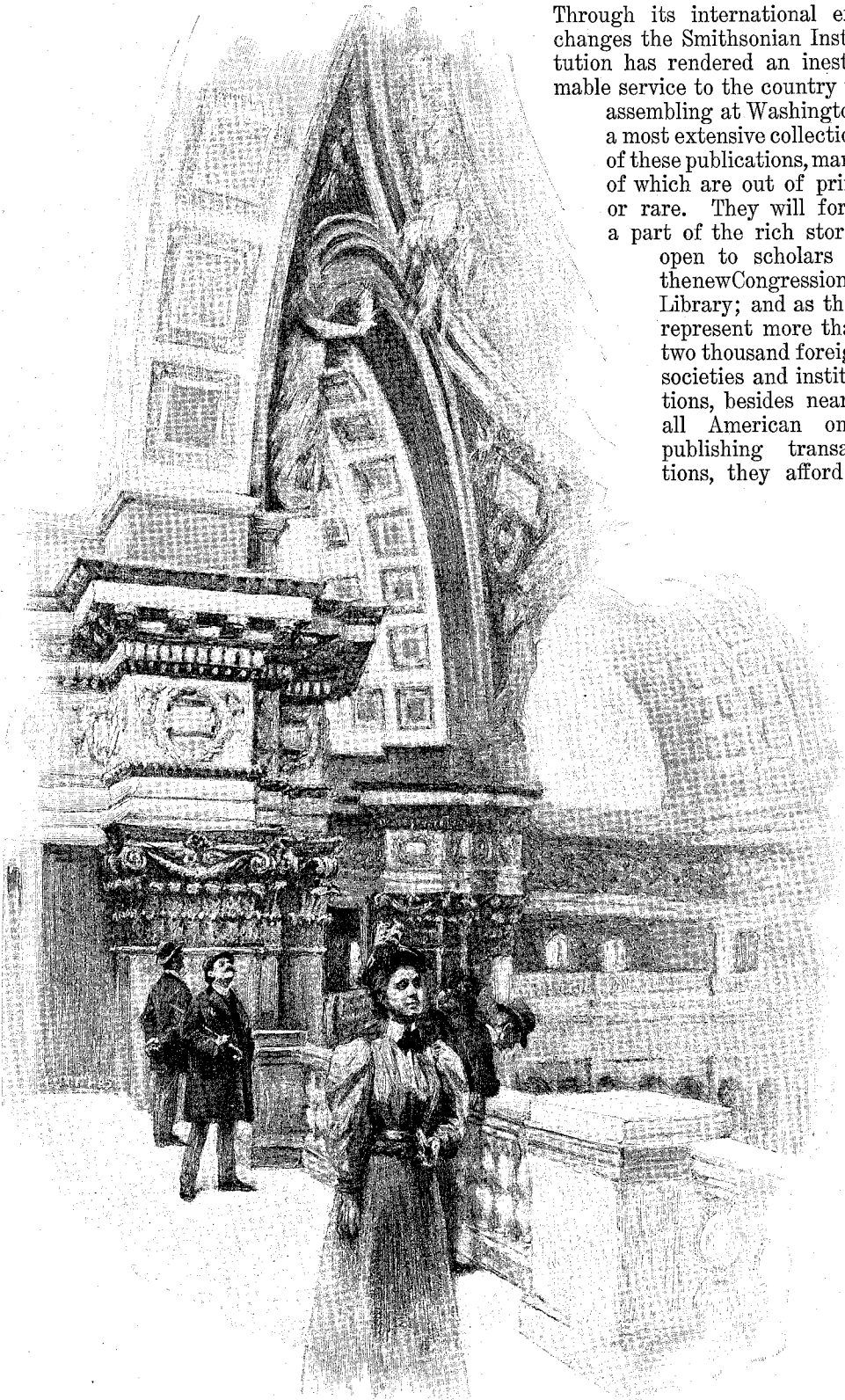
While its primary function has been and still is to furnish the national legislature with all the aids in their far-reaching and responsible duties which a comprehensive library can supply, its more extensive province has made it the conservator of the nation's literature. By the wise legislation of Congress it has been made the one designated legal repository of the entire product of the American press, so far as issued under the government guaranty of copyright. If this salutary and conservative measure had been in force from the beginning of copyright in 1790, instead of being confined to the last twenty-five years, we should now be in possession of an unapproached and unattainable completeness in every department of American books. In the absence of any central place of deposit, the copyright requirements of earlier years were most negligently and imperfectly complied with, and multitudes of books have wholly disappeared, or are found only in second-hand book-shops or in the cabinets of curious collectors. Considered in a scientific view or as absolute knowledge, the loss may not be greatly to be deplored; but, taking a single example, let the reader consider how substantial a benefit it would be to those interested in the profession of education to be assured of finding in a national collection every school- or text-book produced in the United States during the period of a century. Writers for the press may learn as much from the failures of their predecessors as from their successes. And the historian of American literature who would be thoroughly comprehensive cannot overlook the forgotten books read, and perhaps admired, by former generations. Nor can any nation claiming to hold a front rank in civilization shirk the obligation of preserving, in one inclusive and not exclusive collection open to the whole people, all the books which the country produces. From the lack of care in the past to enforce this judicious policy, the National Library of Great Britain has been for years buying up at great cost the dramas, pamphlets, chap-books, and other productions of English literature in past ages, to fill innumerable gaps in its great collection.

Where in America can one find even a respectably full collection of the pamphlet literature of which the country has been so prolific? This class of writings appears fore-

doomed in each generation to swift and irremediable destruction, unless preserved in public libraries. Yet its great value, as reflecting in condensed and often masterly style the real spirit of the age which produced it, with its controversies, political, religious, and social, and the ideas which moved the public mind, has been recognized by all philosophic historians as incalculable. If all authors of pamphlets would send their productions to the library of the Government, they would not only secure the preservation of their own thought, but would be found to have performed a useful public service. As an instance of the historical value of pamphlet literature, take the Thomason collection of twenty thousand pieces, covering the Cromwellian period in England. Its owner sedulously collected and laid aside every issue of the press from 1649 to 1660; and the collection, after escaping the ravages of fire and of two hostile armies, was finally bought by the king, and afterward presented to the British Museum Library. Carlyle made extensive use of this inestimable collection. In like manner, the great La Bédoyère collection of printed matter relating to the French Revolution, purchased for the National Library of France in 1863, covered exhaustively the issues of the press, including periodicals, for twenty-five years, and its 15,500 volumes were the fruit of fifty years' assiduous research by an enthusiastic and untiring collector. Another devotee to the collection and preservation of historical material, the late Peter Force of Washington, was for forty years engaged in amassing a rich library of manuscripts, newspapers, books, pamphlets, and maps illustrative of American history. He ransacked the book-shops of the cities, imported from abroad, and was a frequent bidder at auctions, where he secured the Duane and the Wolcott collections of pamphlets, representing the carefully preserved and bound gatherings of a Republican and a Federalist during many years of public and political life. The Force collection was fortunately saved from dispersion, and now forms an invaluable part of the Congressional Library.

In another field of library collection, which the Smithsonian Institution may be said to have made its own, consider the value of a complete series of the reports, transactions, and other publications of scientific bodies. Embracing as these do the results of the labors of men of science in every field of thought or investigation, they furnish material of the first importance to the student.

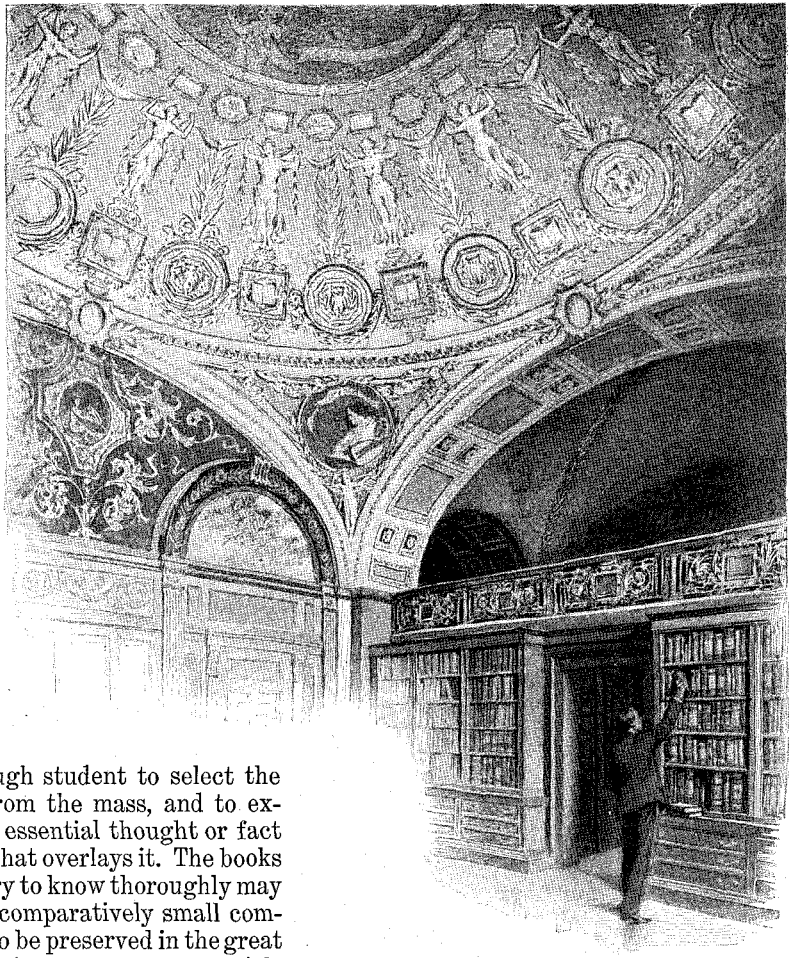
Through its international exchanges the Smithsonian Institution has rendered an inestimable service to the country in assembling at Washington a most extensive collection of these publications, many of which are out of print or rare. They will form a part of the rich stores open to scholars in the new Congressional Library; and as they represent more than two thousand foreign societies and institutions, besides nearly all American ones publishing transactions, they afford a



THE MAIN READING-ROOM GALLERY.

copious repository of scientific information for public use and reference.

That a library is useful and valuable in the direct ratio of its completeness is a postulate that may be termed self-evident, and fairly so. «The true university of these days,» says Thomas Carlyle, «is a collection of books.» While the vast extent of the world's literature may fill the ordinary reader with dismay, it needs only the practised eye and quick discernment of the thorough student to select the more important from the mass, and to extract in each the essential thought or fact from the verbiage that overlays it. The books which it is necessary to know thoroughly may be comprised in a comparatively small compass. The rest are to be preserved in the great literary conservatories—some as memorials of the past, some as chronicles of the times, and not a few as models to be avoided. It is easy to pronounce the great majority of the books in our larger libraries «rubbish,» and to propose, as has frequently been done, to make a bonfire of the trash which the copyright law brings into the government library at Washington. But the grave question confronts us, Where are we to begin? Are there any judgments likely to concur as to what is to be preserved? It is a common experience that the book which was nothing to us at one time came to have a most unexpected value at another. When the priest and the barber, in the immortal romance of Cervantes, sought to purge the library of Don Quixote of the perilous stuff which had bewildered his artless brain, the self-consti-



THE LIBRARIAN'S OFFICE.

tuted censors were not agreed as to what should be condemned to the flames. Do the learned editors who would like to have the great library «weeded» ever reflect that their own works in great folio might be the first to go out, to make room for smaller books, if not better ones?

The ever-widening sphere and influence of the periodical press—one of the great phenomena of modern times—suggest the importance of preserving in our most representative libraries a copious selection from the daily newspapers, and a full collection of the literature of magazines and reviews. While no library, however comprehensive, could possibly store all the periodical publications (now amounting in the United States alone to more than twenty thousand, as against only eight thousand in 1875), it is none the less its proper function to provide full sets of the more important ones. They



A. R. SPOFFORD.



THE NORTH CORRIDOR OF THE GRAND STAIRCASE HALL.

afford the completest mirror of the times to be derived from any single source. Taken together, they supply the richest material for the historian and the student of comparative civilization in all its aspects—literary, political, moral, social, religious, and economic. More and more the best thought and the inventive genius of the age become reflected in their pages. No investigator in any department whose aim is full information can afford to neglect this fruitful mine, where his most valuable material will frequently be found; and it is to be considered that unless the representative library preserves them, a very large portion of them will not be preserved in accessible form at all. The destiny of most periodicals is swift destruction. The obvious causes of their rapid disappearance are their great volume, inevitably growing with each year, the difficulty of finding room to store them in our small dwellings, the ravages of fire, and the continual demand of paper for the uses of trade. Add to these the

large cost of binding sets of periodicals, and the preference of the majority of families for books, and the reasons why very few private subscribers to periodicals can afford to bind and preserve them are apparent. So much the more important is it that public libraries should not neglect a duty which is due both to their own age and to posterity. These unconsidered trifles of to-day, which are looked upon as not worth space to store or money to bind, are the very things which the man of the future, intent upon the reconstruction of the past, will search for with eagerness. Accordingly, it has been the policy of the library of the United States for nearly thirty years past to preserve and bind up at least two of the daily journals of each State and Territory, and all the magazines and reviews obtainable, with a selection of the weekly press. No department of the library is so widely used, not only for purposes of reference, but of study. When it is considered how far-reaching are the fields embraced in the wide range of these periodicals, literary, religious, scientific, political,

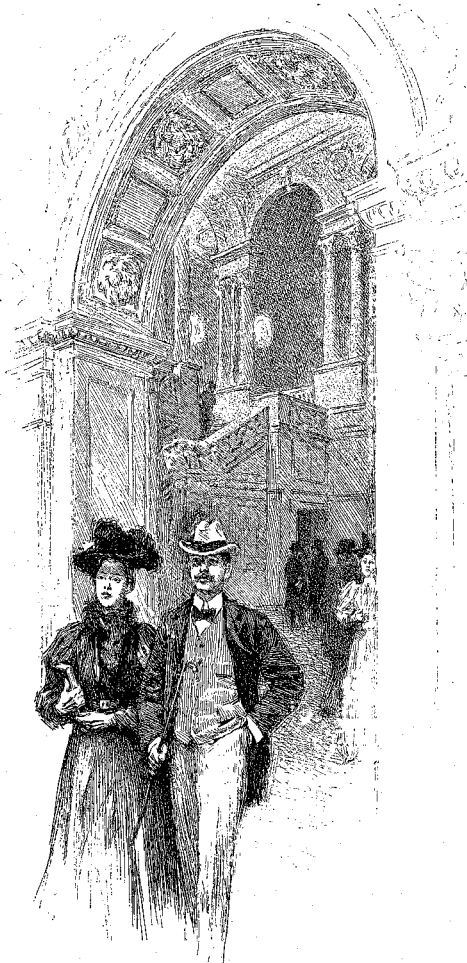
technical, philosophical, social, fashionable, medical, legal, educational, agricultural, bibliographical, commercial, financial, historical, mechanical, nautical, military, artistic, musical, dramatic, typographical, sanitary, sporting, economic, and miscellaneous, is it any wonder that specialists and writers for the press seek and find ready aid therein for their many-sided labors?

To the skeptical mind, accustomed to undervalue what does not happen to come within the range of its pet idols or pursuits, the observation of a single day's multifold research in the great library might be in the nature of a revelation. Here one finds an industrious compiler intent upon the history of American duels, for which the many files of Northern and Southern newspapers, reaching back to the beginning of the century, afford copious material. At another table sits a deputation from a department, commissioned to make a record of all notable strikes and labor troubles for a series of

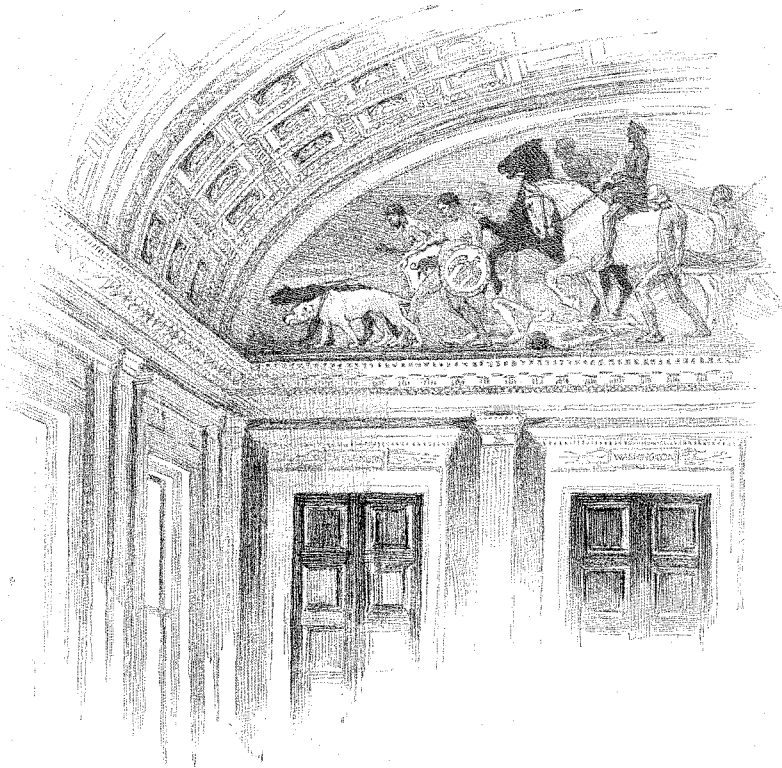
years, to be gleaned from the columns of the journals of leading cities. Hither flock the ever-present searchers into family history, laying under contribution all the genealogies and town and county histories which the country has produced. An absorbed reader of French romances sits side by side with a clergyman perusing homilies or endeavoring to elucidate, through a mass of commentators, a special text. Here are to be found ladies in pursuit of costumes of every age; artists turning over the great folio galleries of Europe for models or suggestions; lawyers seeking precedents or leading cases; journalists verifying dates, speeches, conventions, or other forgotten facts; engineers studying the literature of railways or machinery; actors or amateurs in search of plays or works on the dramatic art; physicians looking up biographies of their profession or the history of epidemics; students of heraldry after coats of arms; inventors searching the specifications and drawings of patents; historical students pursuing some special field in American or foreign annals; scientists verifying facts or citations by original authorities; searchers tracing personal residences or deaths in old directories or newspapers; querists seeking for the words of some half-remembered passage in poetry or prose, or the original author of one of the myriad proverbs which float about the world without a father; architects or builders of houses comparing hundreds of designs and models; teachers perusing works on education or comparing text-books new or old; readers absorbing the great poems of the world; writers in pursuit of new or curious themes among books of antiquities or folk-lore; students of all the questions of finance and economic science; naturalists seeking to trace through many volumes descriptions of species; pursuers of military or naval history or science; enthusiasts venturing into the occult domains of spiritualism or thaumaturgy; explorers of voyages and travels in every region of the globe; fair readers, with dreamy eyes, devouring the last psychological novel; devotees of musical art perusing the lives or the scores of great composers; college and high-school students intent upon "booking up" on themes of study or composition or debate; and a host of other seekers after suggestion or information in a library of encyclopedic range.

This collection, extensive as it is, still falls far short of completeness in many important directions. While its quality is by no means commensurate with its quantity, it yet pos-

sesses a large share of the standard works in all departments of science and literature. Its greatest strength lies in the fields of jurisprudence, political science, American and British history, and what are known as Americana. Its deficiencies are most marked in books in foreign languages, and they are notably great in editions of the classics, in philology, in Oriental literature, and in many of the sciences. With all its manifold defects, it may be said that the library, so far as it is the fruit of selection, has been formed with a view to the highest utility, and with some general unity of plan. Congress may be expected, now that the expenditure upon the building has ceased, to take a more liberal view of its wants, and to make wise provision for such an increase of its intellectual stores as shall be worthy of the nation and the age. Its new and magnificent building, through the far-sighted liberality of the people's representatives, has



A GLIMPSE OF THE GRAND STAIRCASE HALL.



AN EXHIBITION-HALL, SHOWING A PORTION OF THE FRESCOS BY GARI MELCHERS.

been planned and organized to accommodate ultimately, with every convenience of administration. In the judgment of all who have seen it, its architectural and artistic beauty has been pronounced fully equal to its utility. Its gallery of art will soon be filled with an instructive exhibit of the progress

of the arts of design in every form; and it may be hoped that the large-minded policy which has created this noble temple of science, literature, and art will endow it with adequate means of growth, so that its ample shelves may before long be filled with the learning of all lands.

A. R. Spofford.

THE DECORATIONS IN THE NEW CONGRESSIONAL LIBRARY.

THE scene in the new Congressional Library at Washington, when I visited it in the summer of 1896, was interesting and impressive. A guard admitted me at a small door under the imposing terraces and flights of steps which form the approach to the main entrance of the building. I walked through corridor after corridor, ascended broad stairways, and found my way through spacious galleries and vestibules to the great rotunda in the middle of the vast construction. Here was an immense scaffolding rising a hundred

feet or more to the base of the dome, and high above that, as I looked up, I saw the iron elliptical truss-work that swung from the platform of the scaffolding to the top of the dome, carrying ladders and landing-places to the crown of the lantern, 160 feet from the floor. Scores of skilled workmen were carving, fitting, and polishing. Some were perched high in the drum of the dome; others were setting mosaics and laying marble floors. In corridors and halls were rolling platforms and bridges full of busy