

## LAST WORDS

OF ALL the printed items that issue from presses in increasing numbers every year, which should a library keep? Who is to tell? Librarians who are belatedly collecting early booksellers' catalogues, the files of ephemeral periodicals now considered important, and even dime novels of the nineties must find this a sobering question. Perhaps the best answer after all was that given by Sir Anthony Panizzi, Keeper of Printed Books in the British Museum in the important Victorian years 1837-1866. In a report to the Trustees on January 1, 1845, he wrote:

"It will not perhaps be useless to notice the objection which is often urged by some sensible persons, that the British Museum possesses and preserves all the trash that is published. What is trash? . . . Who is to judge of it, and to discriminate? Are novels trash? Who is to decide between a Scott and a .....? Is poetry trash? The Poems of Wordsworth might be likewise rejected. If a librarian had been guided by critics, he would have burned the early productions of Byron, and, had he judged from their first reception, he would have thrown away as worthless the 'Paradise Lost' and Newton's 'Principia.' What sums are now given for the 'trash' published in the reigns of Henry the Eighth, Elizabeth, and James the First! Sir Thomas Bodley called the majority of pamphlets 'riff-raff' and wrote as follows respecting them: 'I can see no good reason to alter my opinion for excluding such books as almanacks, plays, and an infinite number that are daily printed of very unworthy matters. . . .' This was written by a contemporary of Shakespeare."

By way of illustration Panizzi notes that one library, to which books were sent by copyright, had been known to reject as unworthy of a place on its shelves Scott's *Antiquary*, one of Wordsworth's Odes and his "Letter to a Friend of Burns," Cobbett's publications, *The Edinburgh Medical and Surgical Journal*, Byron's *Siege of Corinth*, Shelley's *Alastor*, and Beethoven's musical compositions. He concluded: "These and many other such works were 'put in the Index' in one year. So much for leaving to any one discretion to select."

L.A.M.