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Libraries are treasure troves of knowledge and shrines of wisdom. They preserve the experiences and insights of centuries, indeed millennia, and make them accessible to the interested, the students, the curious, and researchers alike. Just a few decades ago, they were the heart of every university, college, and educational institution. There, scholars and students sat with bowed heads over texts and books, reading, taking notes, looking things up, while the knowledge of all times unfolded before them. They worked there, just like their teachers and generations before them had done: the scholars of the Baroque era, the humanists of the Renaissance, or the monks of antiquity.

Of course, many things transformed over the centuries. The number of books grew, the spaces expanded, and at one point, books were chained down, only to be liberated once again a few centuries later. At one point, the library could be heated during the winter months, except when war caused shortages of wood or coal. The lighting also improved significantly: gas lamps illuminated the space with their soft glow, while the advent of electric bulbs suddenly flooded the rooms with bright, crisp light. Naturally, technology made its way in, air-conditioning came, microfilm brought books from deep basements and the first microfiches turned up, which meant that some texts were only accessible through a microfiche reader that allowed the projection of tiny film images onto a screen. Obviously, the students and scholars changed. Long since, they no longer wore monk's robes, and stiff coats or gowns fell out of fashion; wigs were worn at one point, only to go out of style again, with hair fluctuating between being short and long. Women claimed their rightful space, and what may have initially caused disbelief and nervous smiles from their male peers soon became as normal as coffee machines in the entrance area.

But, despite all this change, the library remained the heart of every educational institution. Moreover, for the last two centuries, libraries have been the centre of learning, knowledge, ideas, and intellectual life. Already schoolchildren visited them. For class, adults read newspapers and the newest books, and both the middle class and the nobility found access to distant times and worlds within their walls. Although seldom and scholarly circles, they served as a cradle for new ideas. To give an example: The legendary British Museum gathered great thinkers of their