

For him that stealeth, [or borroweth and returneth not,] a Book from this Library,  
Let it change into a Serpent in his hand and rend him.  
Let him be struck with Palsy, and all his Members blasted.  
Let him languish in Pain, crying aloud for Mercy, and let there be no surcease to his Agony till  
he sink to Dissolution.  
Let Book-worms gnaw his Entrails in token of the Worm that dieth not, and when at last he  
goeth to his final Punishment, let the Flames of Hell consume him for ever and aye.

*Curse on book thieves*, from the monastery of San Pedro, Barcelona, Spain

“The book curse from the San Pedro monastery is no such thing. It is an amusing hoax dating from 1909. Edmund Pearson, joker, librarian and true-crime writer, claimed it was part of a rediscovered *Old Librarian's Almanack* originally published in 1773. The *Old Librarian* dated the translation to 1712, "English'd by Sir Matthew Mahan" in a guide to his Spanish travels.

Pearson's imposture was taken as a genuine discovery on its publication and received favourable reviews, although the forgery, never completely hidden, was quickly uncovered. However, the memories of librarians are short, and few of the library websites that repeat the curse (Google finds it over 5,000 times, and in some very respectable places) question its authenticity. The internet has allowed it to prosper. But to those who might consider the illicit removal of library books, the fact that it is inauthentic is irrelevant. In calling attention to the evils of book theft it might be said to be doing its job, no matter who wrote it.”

From the article: “Marx, Pandora & the Tower of Porn” by Colin Higgins, published in Times Higher Education, June 9, 2011

More information on: *The Old Librarian's Almanack*

Source:

Wayne A. Wiegand, *The History of a Hoax: Edmund Lester Pearson, John Cotton Dana, and 'The Old Librarian's Almanack'*, Beta Phi Mu, Pittsburgh PA, 1979; cloth, 75 pp.  
(Beta Phi Mu is "The International Library and Information Studies Honor Society.")

Edmund Lester Pearson (1880-1937) was a professional librarian. He got an AB degree from Harvard College in 1902, and a B.L.S. (Bachelor of Library Science?) degree from the New York State Library School at Albany in 1904. From 1904 to 1909, he held posts at the Washington DC Public Library, the Library of Congress, the War Department, and a private library in Asheville NC. In 1909, he returned to Newburyport MA to devote full time to writing. Pearson's "Old Librarian" views library patrons as insufferable nuisances distracting librarians from their true vocation (personal reading), when not an actual danger to precious books they itch to steal or damage. Patrons certainly had no useful suggestions to make on what books to acquire. No librarian in 1909 would admit to sharing the "Old Librarian's attitudes, but some of the satire could apply to bureaucracies in general.