

regular visitors at Don Saltero's coffee-house in its earliest days. The place was one of the exhibitions which Benjamin Franklin went to see when working as a journeyman printer in London; and it is on record how that after leaving the house one day he swam from Chelsea to Blackfriars, performing sundry feats in the water as he went along.

From *Old and New London*, 1878

Louise Imogen Guiney: *In the Reading-Room of the British Museum*

Praised be the moon of books! that doth above
 A world of men, the fallen Past behold,
 And fill the spaces else so void and cold
 To make a very heaven again thereof;
 As when the sun is set behind a grove,
 And faintly unto nether ether rolled,
 All night his whiter image and his mould
 Grows beautiful with looking on her love.

Thou therefore, moon of so divine a ray,
 Lend to our steps both fortitude and light!
 Feebly along a venerable way
 They climb the infinite, or perish quite;
 Nothing are days and deeds to such as they,
 While in this liberal house thy face is bright.

THE LITERARY LIFE

Many writers are forced to work at humdrum jobs in order to support themselves and their writing. The novelist Anthony Trollope (1815–82) endured boredom, humiliation and embarrassment in the Colonel-Secretary's office of the Post Office in London. He describes with beautifully judged self-deprecation the tedious and at times morally degenerate days spent in clerical drudgery for little reward. He finally volunteered for—and got—a placement in Ireland which proved to be a financial and creative liberation. He turned many of his London experiences to good account in his novels, not least his frequent scrapes with moneylenders. The tribulations of Burgo Fitzgerald (*see p. 114*) are in part based on Trollope's own tailor's bill of £12 that grew, fed by compound interest, into a massive £200.

Other writers seek solitude. In *De Profundis* Wilde recalls his vain attempt to cloister himself in Piccadilly and work away from the domestic interruptions of his wife and children in Chelsea. He had not bargained, though, for the attentions of Lord Alfred Douglas, 'Bosie', who was broke, idle and bored and insisted on a daily programme of expensive and disruptive lunches and dinners. Wilde contrasts these bacchanals at the Café Royal or the Berkeley with the intimate—and