Universiteit Utrecht

Two Problems with Footnotes



Victor Azmanov
victor@azmanov.net
23 October 2026

Contents

1. Two Problems with Footnotes
2. The Solution: Plain Old Text
3. How does it work?
4. How does it compare to other online historical archives?
5. How did I make it?

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On May 15th 1845, John Pringle Nichol—clergyman, political economist, and author of the popular *Architecture of the Heavens* (1837)—opened the *Dublin Evening Post* to find himself accused of "infidelity, atheism, and materialism"[15]. The *Post* noted that "the paternity of [*The Vestiges*] was generally attributed to [Mr Nichol]". The suspicion was not arbitrary: The similarities between Nichol's *Architecture* and the first chapter of *Vestiges* were widely

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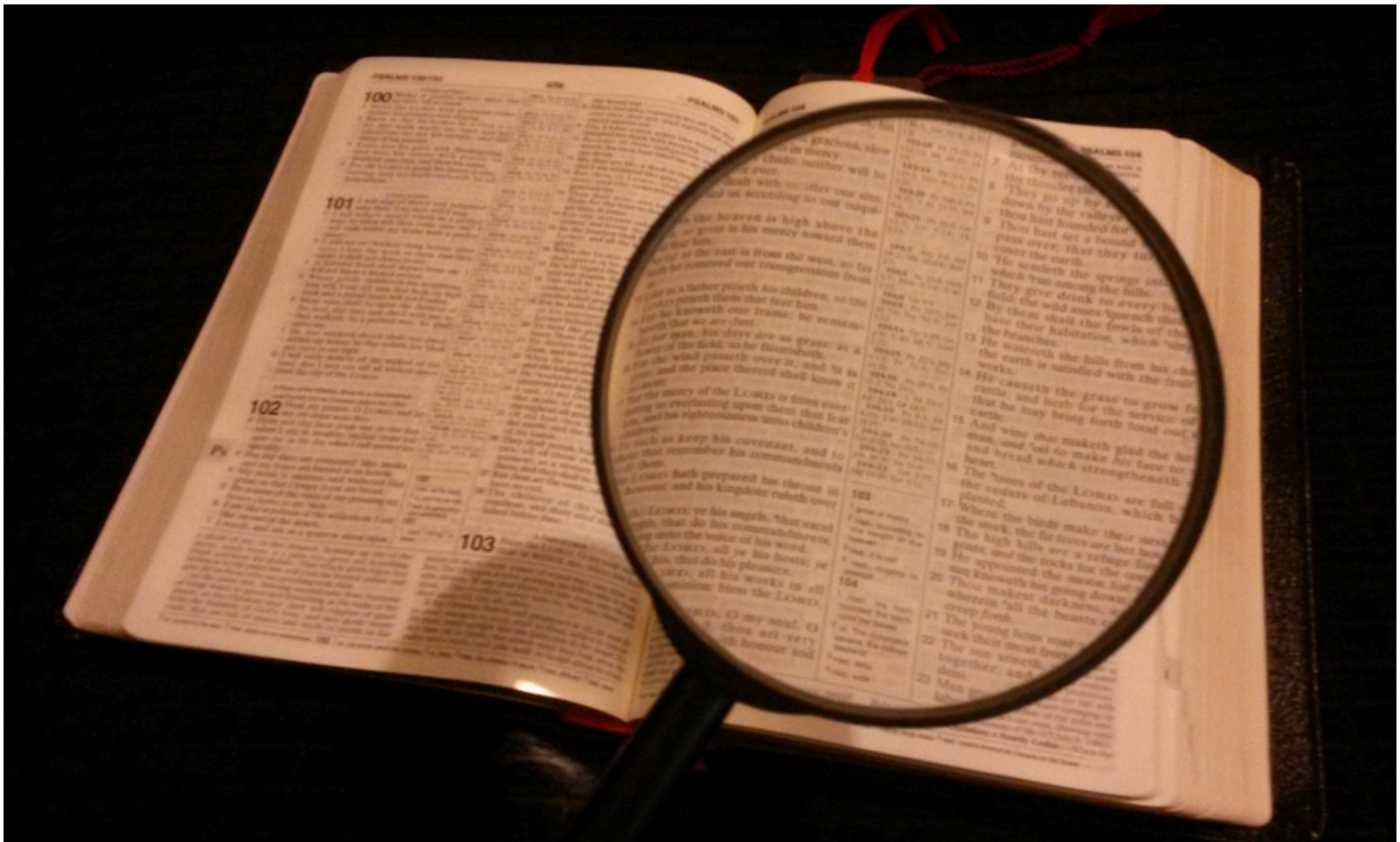
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[15] "Professor Nichol," *Dublin Evening Post*, May 17, 1845

What is the point of a footnote?

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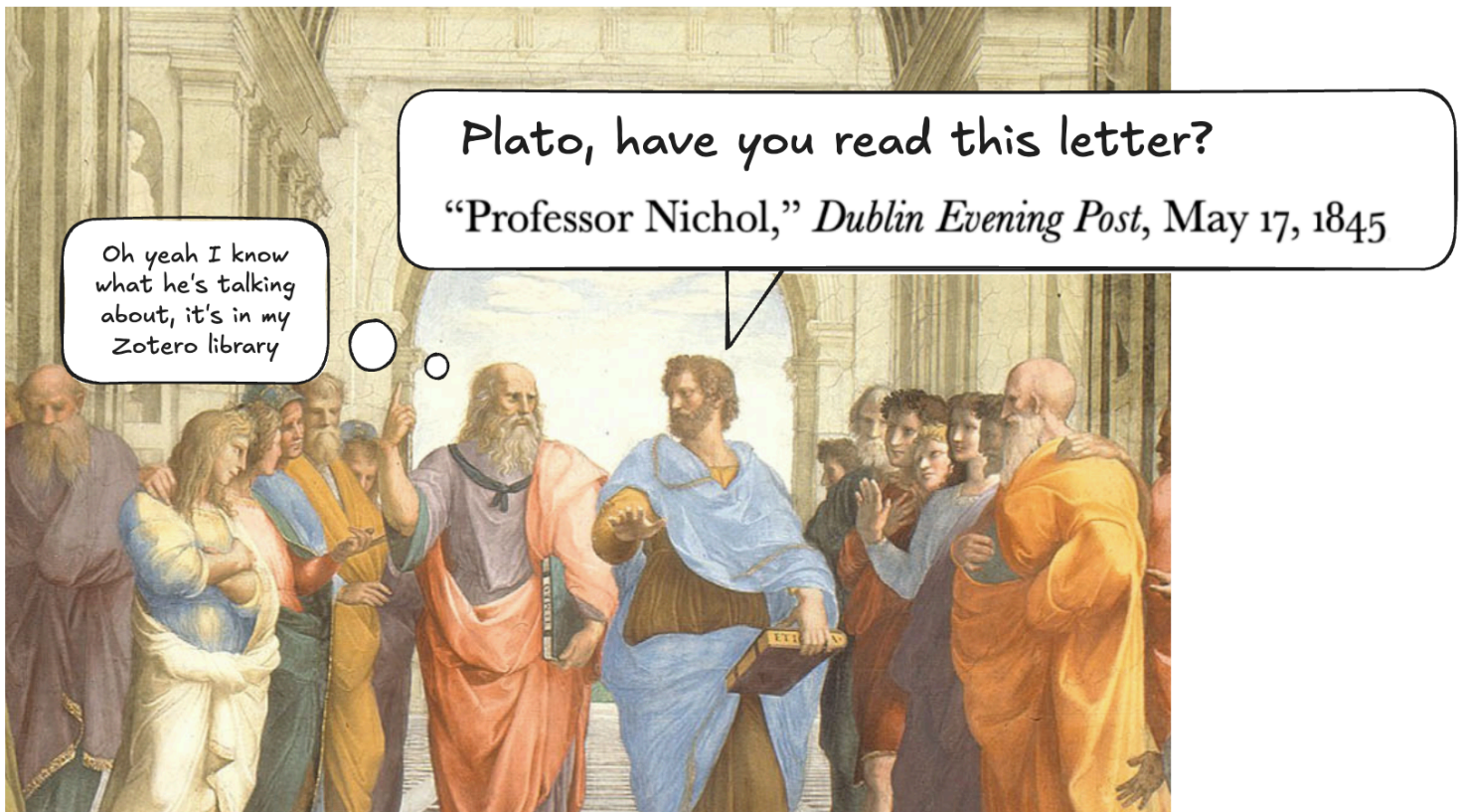
1. **Verifiability**: other historians can check your work


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What is the point of a footnote?

1. **Verifiability**: other historians can check your work
2. **Pointability**: a pointer to an item in a shared corpus

Pointability



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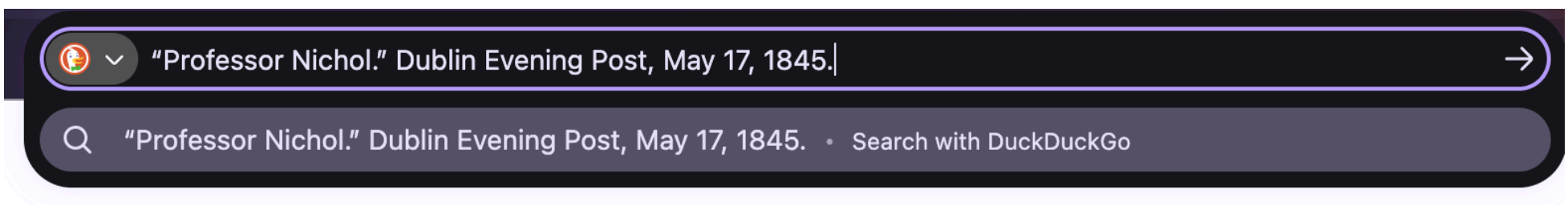
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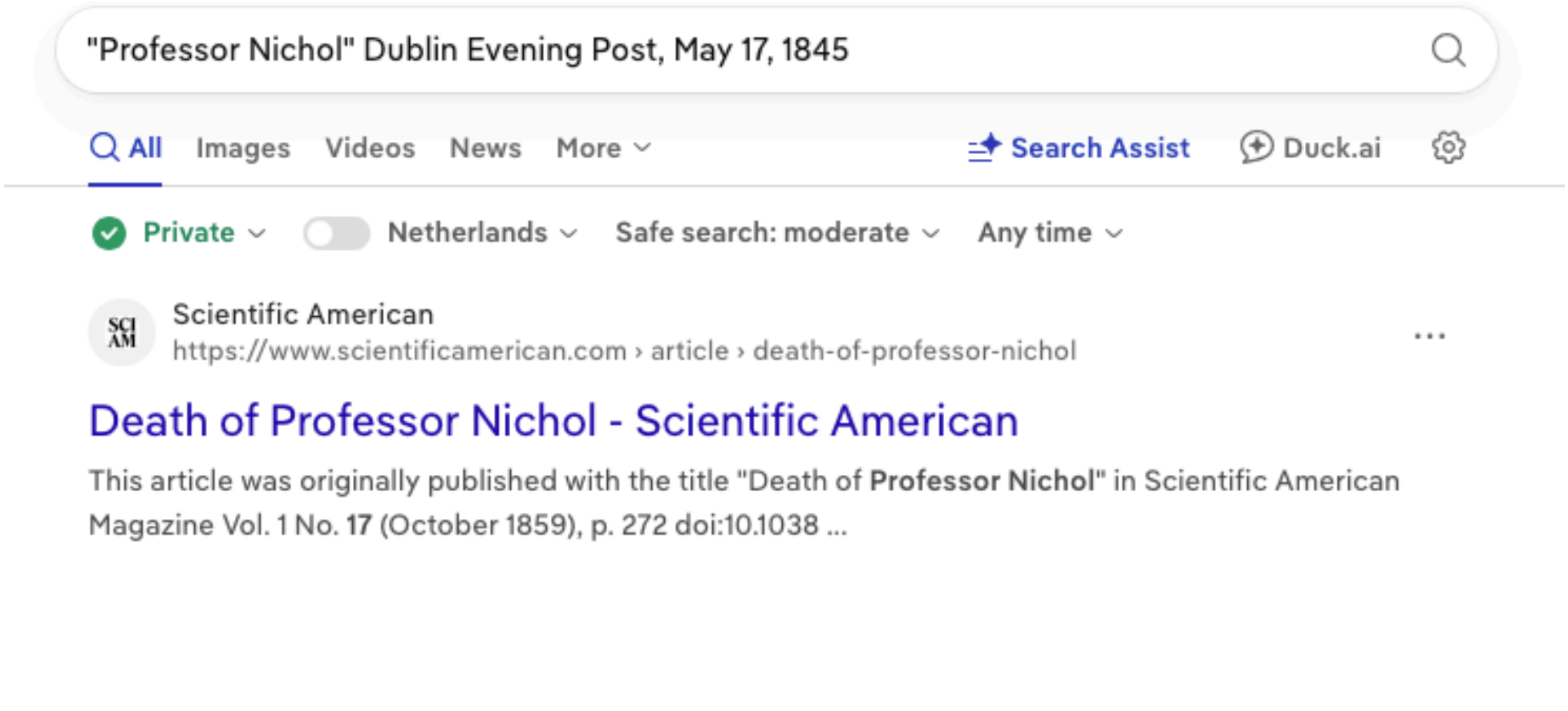
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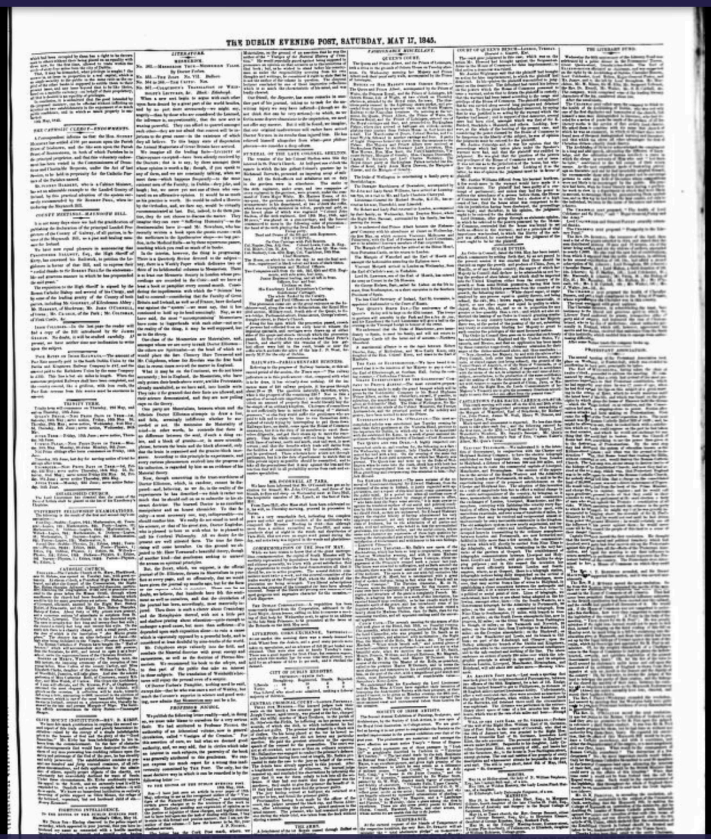
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"Professor Nichol." Dublin Evening Post, May 17, 1845.
"Professor Nichol." Dublin Evening Post, May 17, 1845. • Search with DuckDuckGo

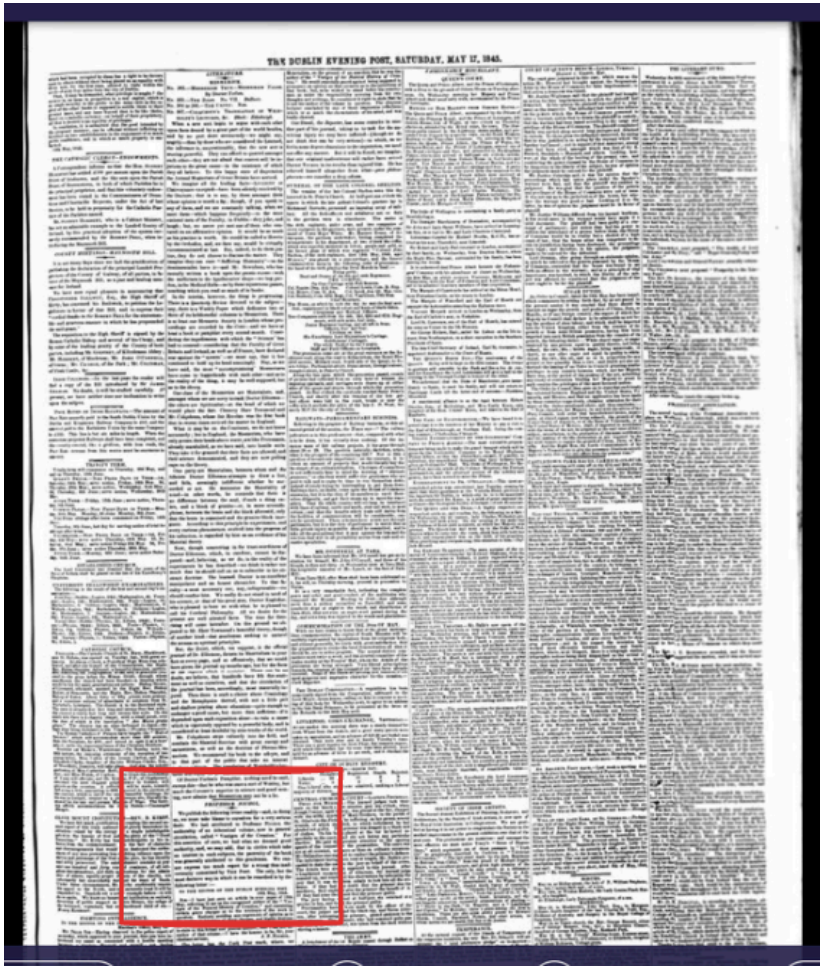

"Professor Nichol" Dublin Evening Post, May 17, 1845
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Death of Professor Nichol - Scientific American
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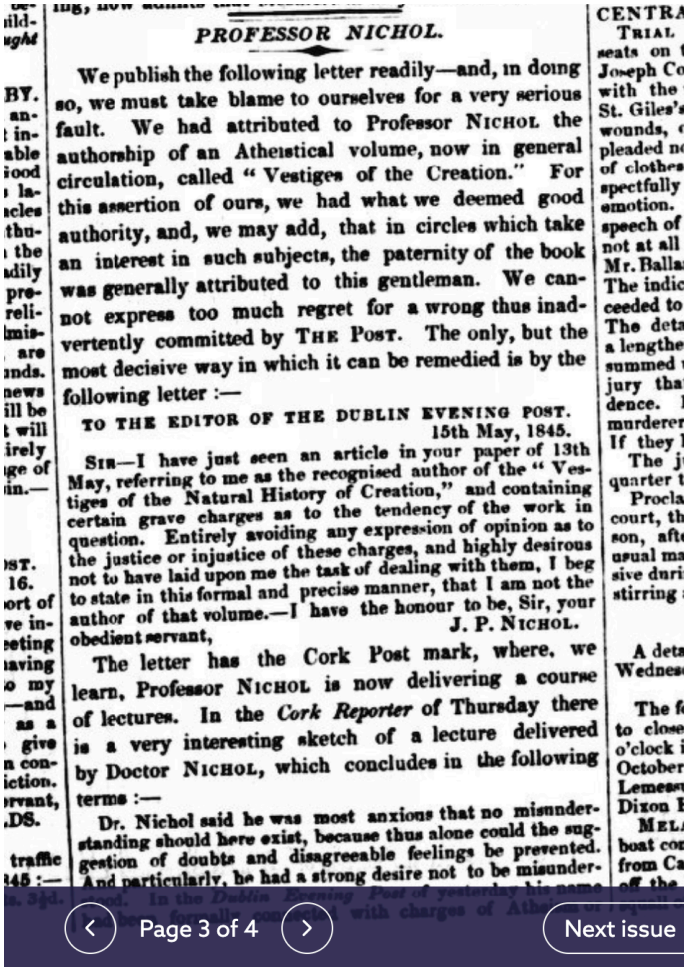

A FEW HOURS
LATER...



THE DUBLIN EVENING POST, SATURDAY, MAY 17, 1845.

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THE DUBLIN EVENING POST, SATURDAY, MAY 17, 1845.



PROFESSOR NICHOL.

We publish the following letter readily—and, in doing so, we must take blame to ourselves for a very serious fault. We had attributed to Professor NICHOL the authorship of an Atheistical volume, now in general circulation, called "Vestiges of the Creation." For this assertion of ours, we had what we deemed good authority, and, we may add, that in circles which take an interest in such subjects, the paternity of the book was generally attributed to this gentleman. We cannot express too much regret for a wrong thus inadvertently committed by THE POST. The only, but the most decisive way in which it can be remedied is by the following letter :—

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Next issue

Verifiability

\+ Source can be found in principle

– Finding it takes ~30 minutes of searching

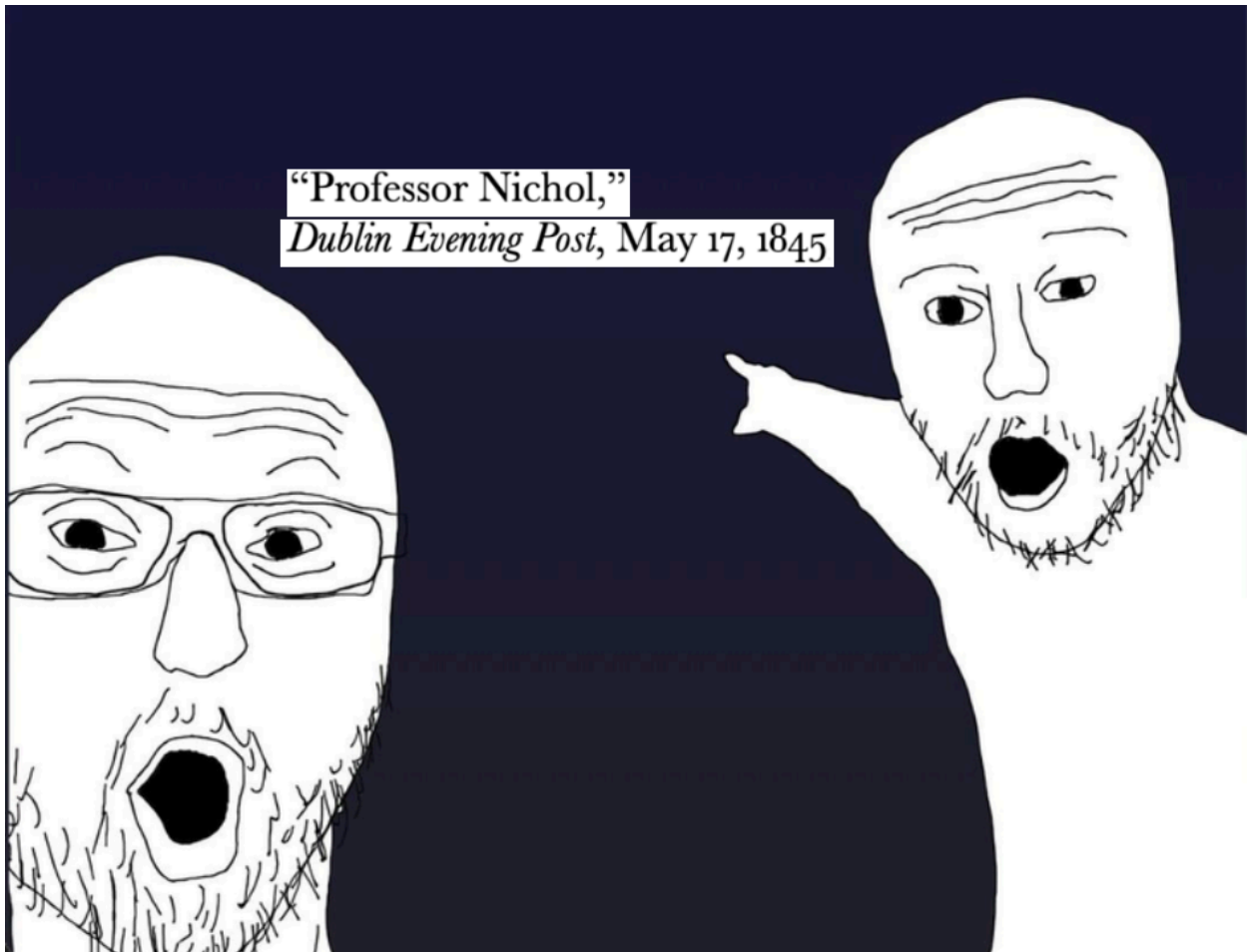
– Reading experience is cumbersome

verifiable, but at a high cost to the reader.

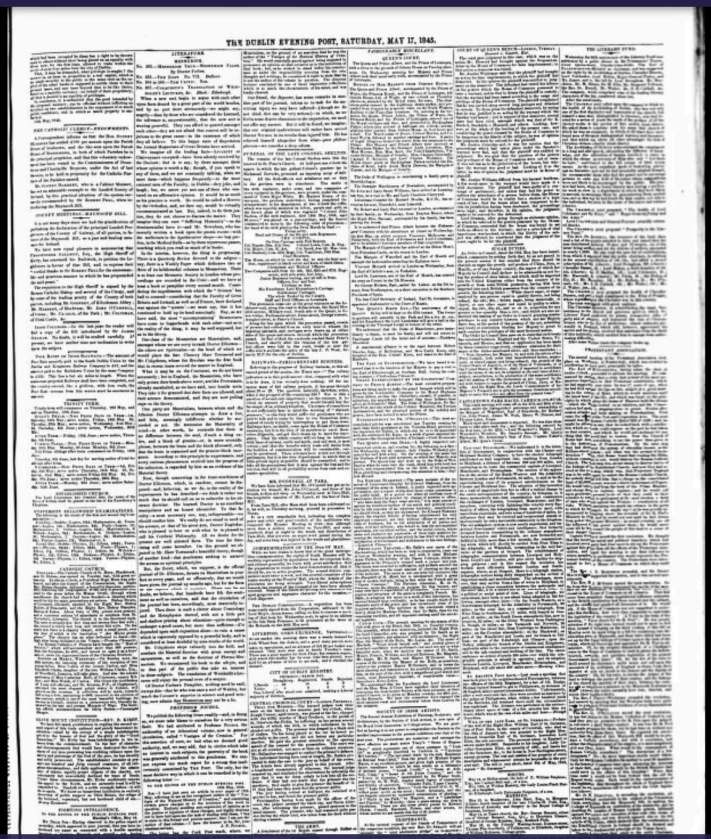
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The Pointability Problem

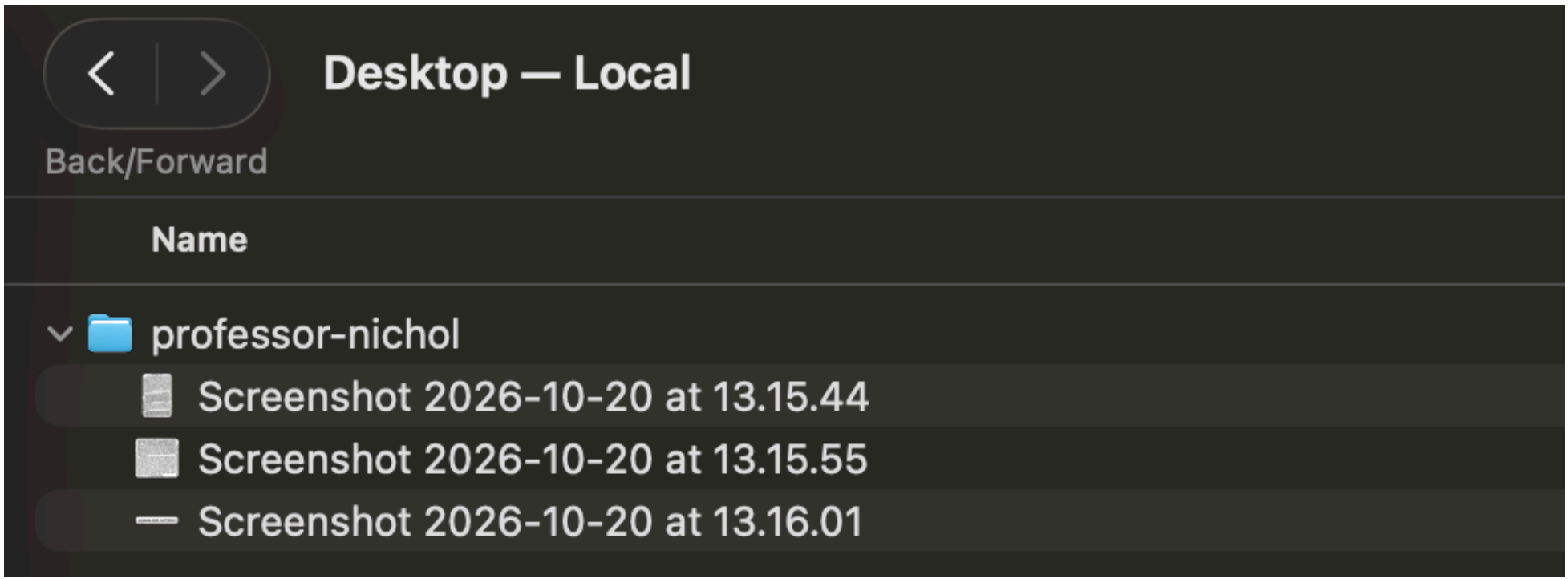

"Professor Nichol,"
Dublin Evening Post, May 17, 1845

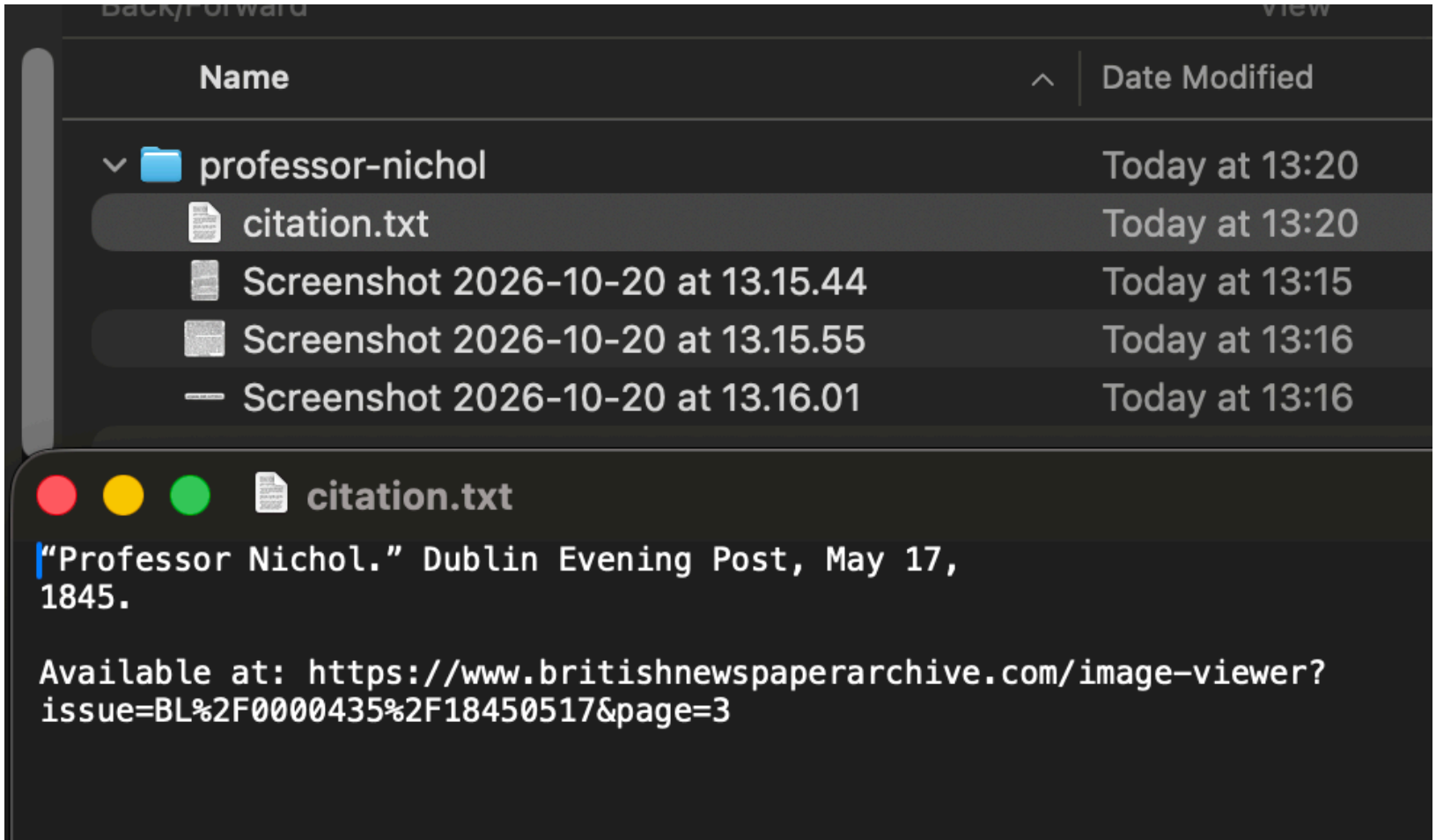

Geographica

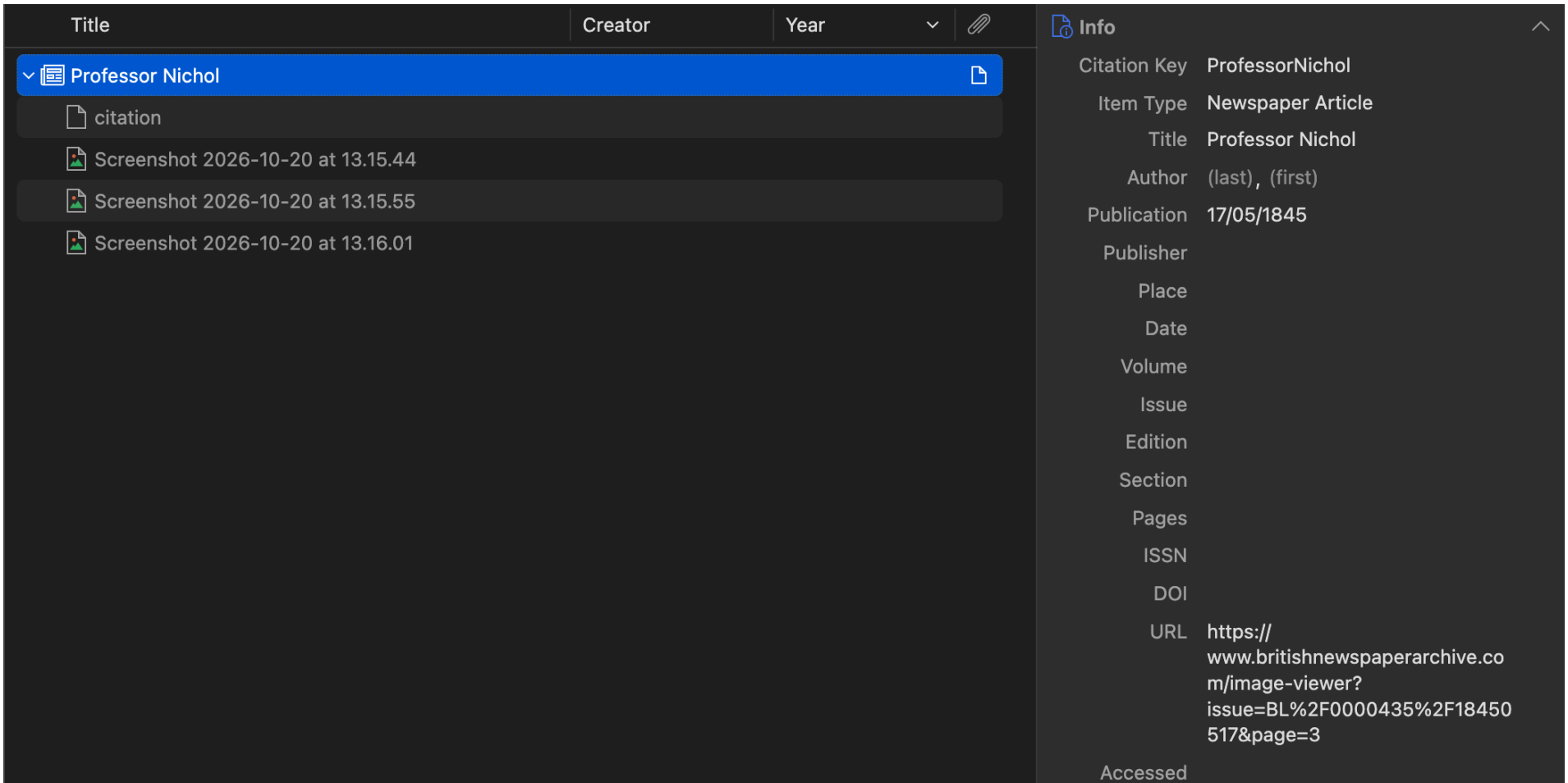


THE DUBLIN EVENING POST, SATURDAY, MAY 17, 1845.

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Page 3 of 4
Next issue


Desktop — Local
Back/Forward
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professor-nichol
Screenshot 2026-10-20 at 13.15.44
Screenshot 2026-10-20 at 13.15.55
Screenshot 2026-10-20 at 13.16.01


Name
Date Modified
professor-nichol
Today at 13:20
citation.txt
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“Professor Nichol.” Dublin Evening Post, May 17, 1845.
Available at: https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.com/image-viewer?issue=BL%2F0000435%2F18450517&page=3


Title
Creator
Year
Professor Nichol
citation
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Screenshot 2026-10-20 at 13.15.55
Screenshot 2026-10-20 at 13.16.01
Info
Citation Key ProfessorNichol
Item Type Newspaper Article
Title Professor Nichol
Author (last), (first)
Publication 17/05/1845
Publisher
Place
Date
Volume
Issue
Edition
Section
Pages
ISSN
DOI
URL https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.com/image-viewer?issue=BL%2F0000435%2F18450517&page=3
Accessed


“Professor Nichol,”
Dublin Evening Post, May 17, 1845

From **Victor Elgersma** <v.j.b.elgersma@students.uu.nl>

To alice@example.mail × Cc Bcc

Subject Vestiges essay

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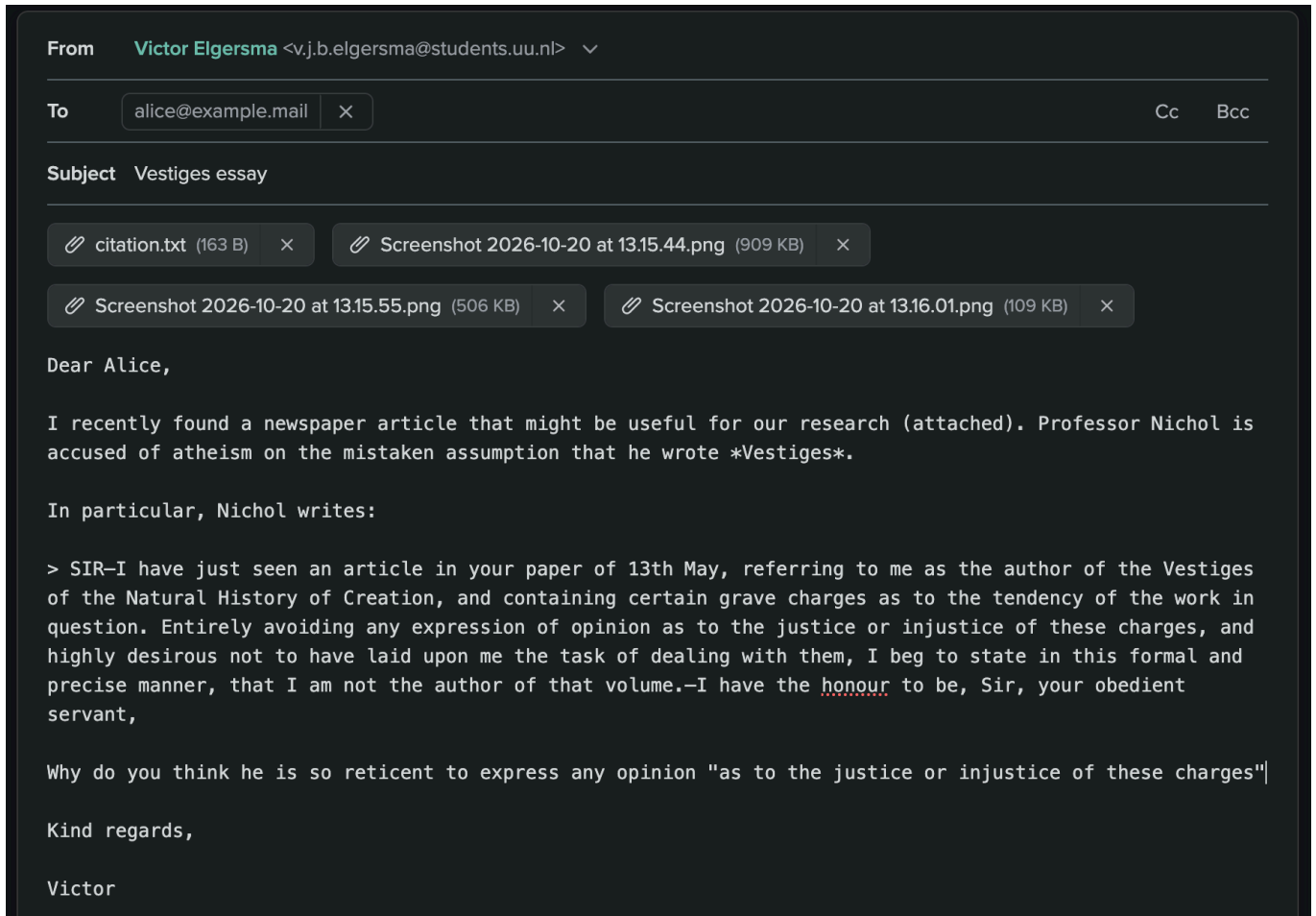
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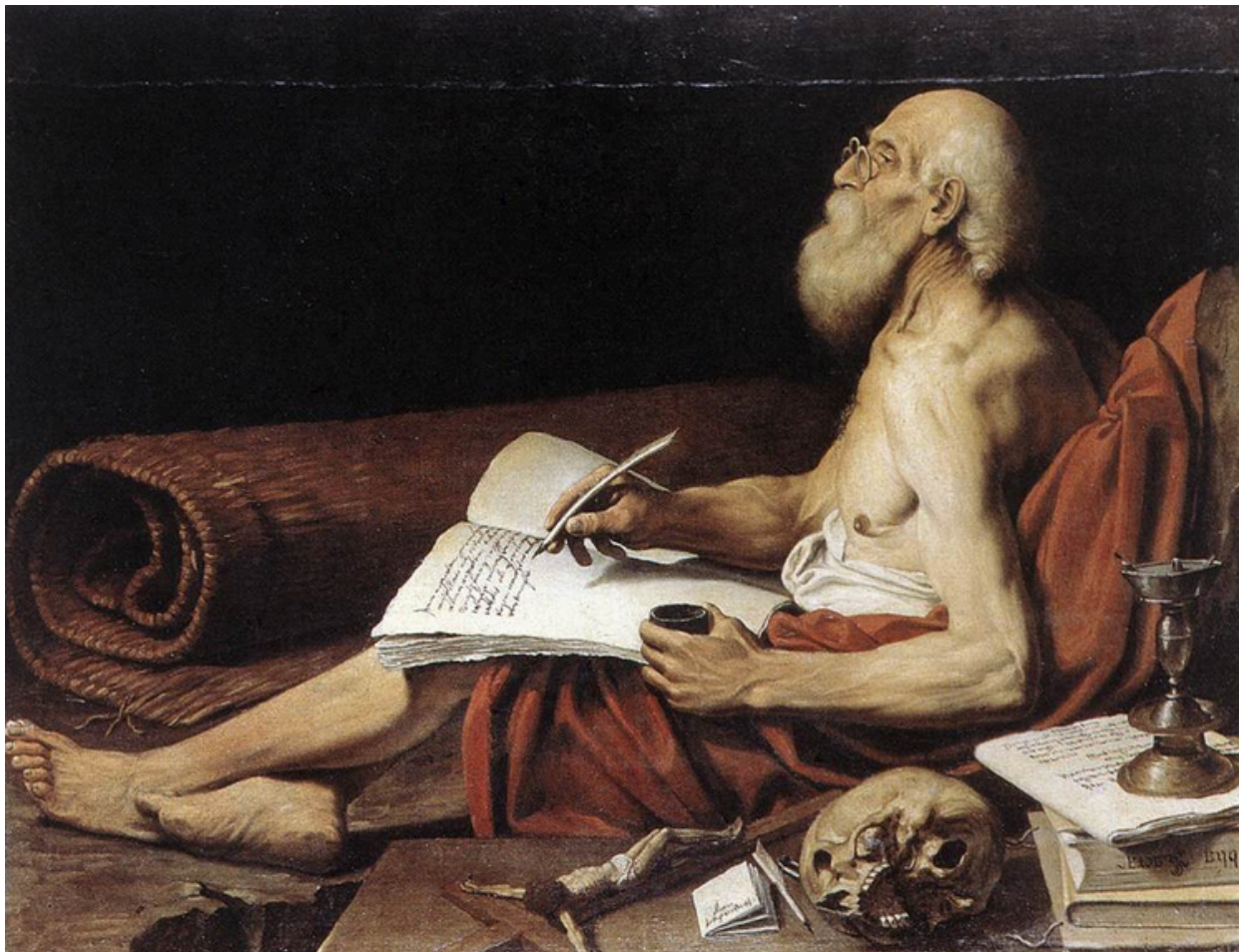
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Dear Alice,

I recently found a newspaper article that might be useful for our research (attached). Professor Nichol is
accused of atheism on the mistaken assumption that he wrote *Vestiges*.

Kind regards,

Victor
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From Victor Elgersma <v.j.b.elgersma@students.uu.nl>
To alice@example.mail
Cc Bcc
Subject Vestiges essay
citation.txt (163 B)
Screenshot 2026-10-20 at 13.15.44.png (909 KB)
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In particular, Nichol writes:
> SIR—I have just seen an article in your paper of 13th May, referring to me as the author of the Vestiges of the Natural History of Creation, and containing certain grave charges as to the tendency of the work in question. Entirely avoiding any expression of opinion as to the justice or injustice of these charges, and highly desirous not to have laid upon me the task of dealing with them, I beg to state in this formal and precise manner, that I am not the author of that volume.—I have the honour to be, Sir, your obedient servant,
Why do you think he is so reticent to express any opinion "as to the justice or injustice of these charges"
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Pointability

\+ Every scholar can cite the same issue and page

– Not ‘pointable’ unless you share the image files

– Quoting from it requires manual transcription

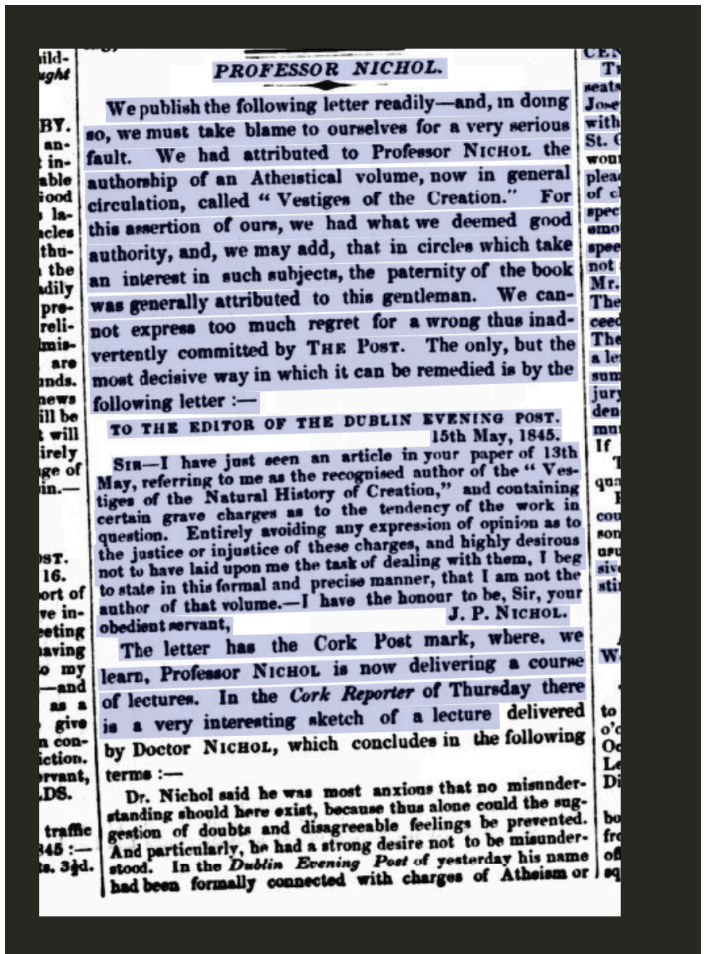
pointable, but at a high cost to the reader.

Standard footnotes are verifiable and pointable —
but only at a high cost to the reader.

Contents

1. ~~Two Problems with Footnotes~~
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Solution?



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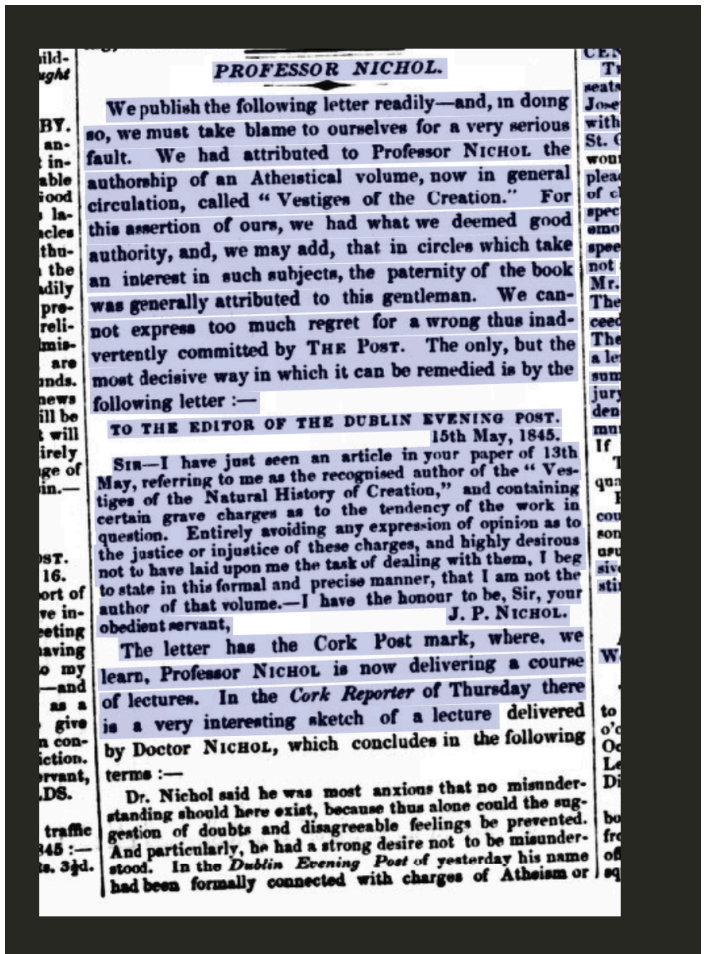
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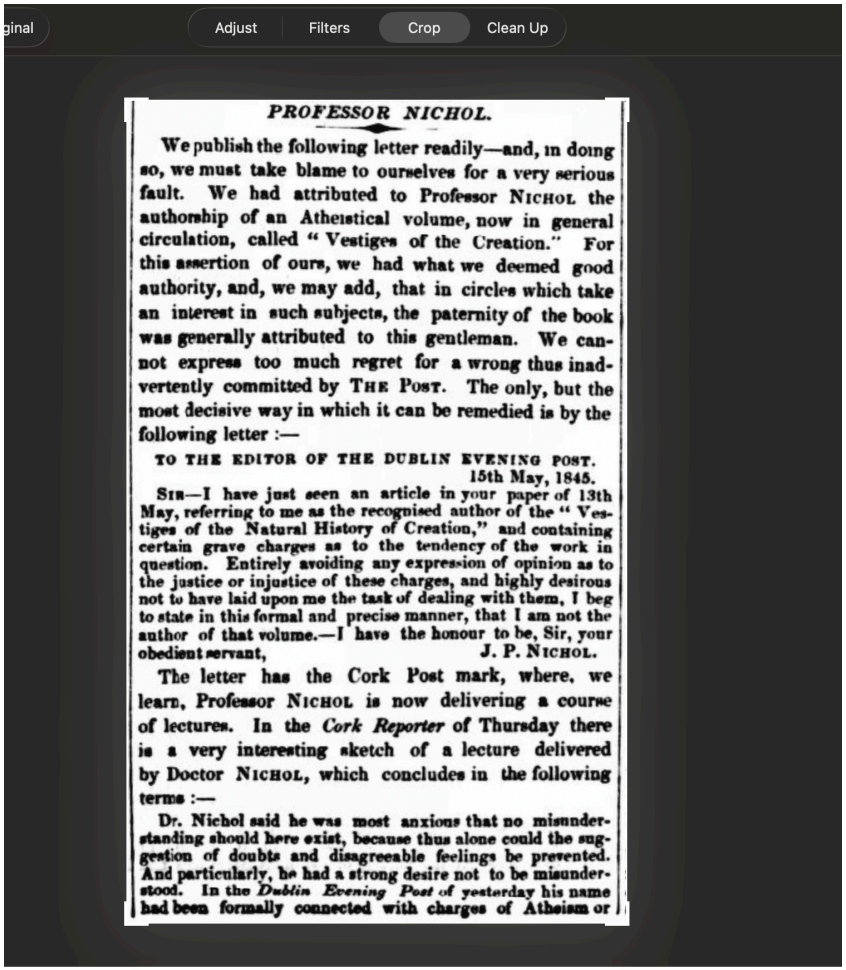
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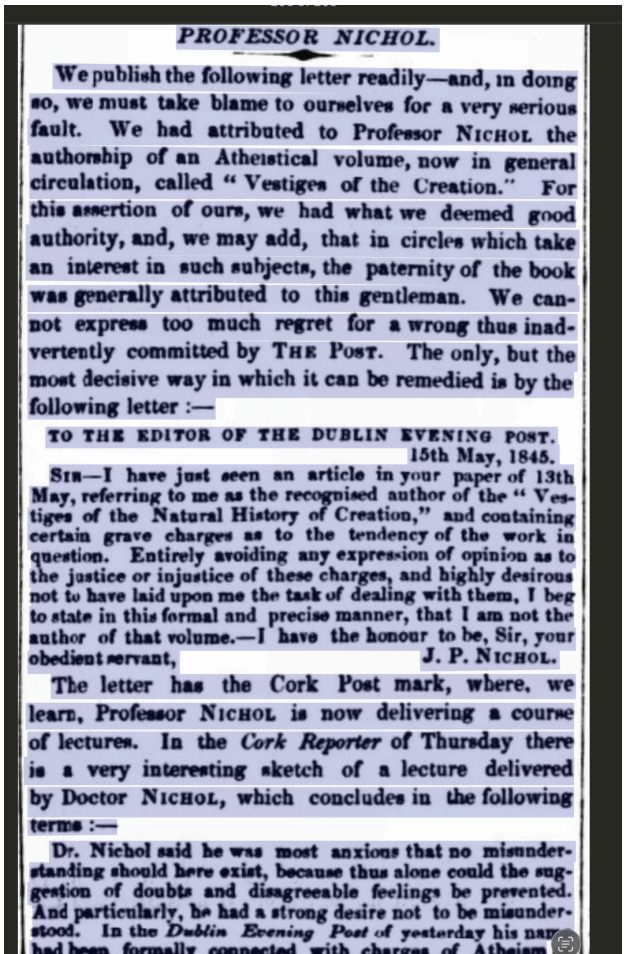
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Transcription (Apple Photos App):

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(LLM text-correction)

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And partiesely brind errong destre not to bar dis nder. [illegible]

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LLM+Human edits

PROFESSOR NICHOL.

We publish the following letter readily—and, in doing so, we must take blame to ourselves for a very serious fault. We had attributed to Professor Nichol the authorship of an Atheistical volume, now in general circulation, called “Vestiges of the Creation.” For this assertion of ours, we had what we deemed good authority, and, we may add, that in circles which take an interest in such subjects, the paternity of the book was generally attributed to this gentleman. We cannot express too much regret for a wrong thus inadvertently committed by The Post. The only, but the most decisive way in which it can be remedied is by the following letter:—

TO THE EDITOR OF THE DUBLIN EVENING POST.
15th May, 1845.

Sir—I have just seen an article in your paper of 13th May, referring to me as the recognised author of the “Vestiges of the Natural History of Creation,” and containing certain grave charges as to the tendency of the work in question. Entirely avoiding any expression of opinion as to the justice or injustice of these charges, and highly desirous not to have laid upon me the task of dealing with them, I beg to state in this formal and precise manner, that I am not the author of that volume.—I have the honour to be, Sir, your obedient servant,

J. P. NICHOL.

The letter has the Cork Post mark, where, we learn, Professor Nichol is now delivering a course of lectures. In the Cork Reporter of Thursday there is a very interesting sketch of a lecture delivered by Doctor Nichol, which concludes in the following terms:—

Dr. Nichol said he was most anxious that no misunderstanding should here exist, because thus alone could the suggestion of doubts and disagreeable feelings be prevented.

And particularly, he had a strong desire not to be misunderstood. In the Dublin Evening Post of yesterday his name had been formally connected with charges of Atheism

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On May 15th 1845, John Pringle Nichol—clergyman, political economist, and author of the popular *Architecture of the Heavens* (1837)—opened the *Dublin Evening Post* to find himself accused of "infidelity, atheism, and materialism"[15]. The *Post* noted that "the paternity of [*The Vestiges*] was generally attributed to [Mr Nichol]". The suspicion was not arbitrary: The similarities between Nichol's *Architecture* and the first chapter of *Vestiges* were widely

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[14] "Vestiges of the Natural History of Creation".

[15] "Professor Nichol," *Dublin Evening Post*, May 17, 1845

[15] "Professor Nichol," *Dublin Evening Post*, May 17, 1845

[15] "Professor Nichol," *Dublin Evening Post*, May 17, 1845 https://sources.vjbe.net/stable/x1aj5.

Professor Nichol

DUBLIN EVENING POST · 17 MAY, 1845

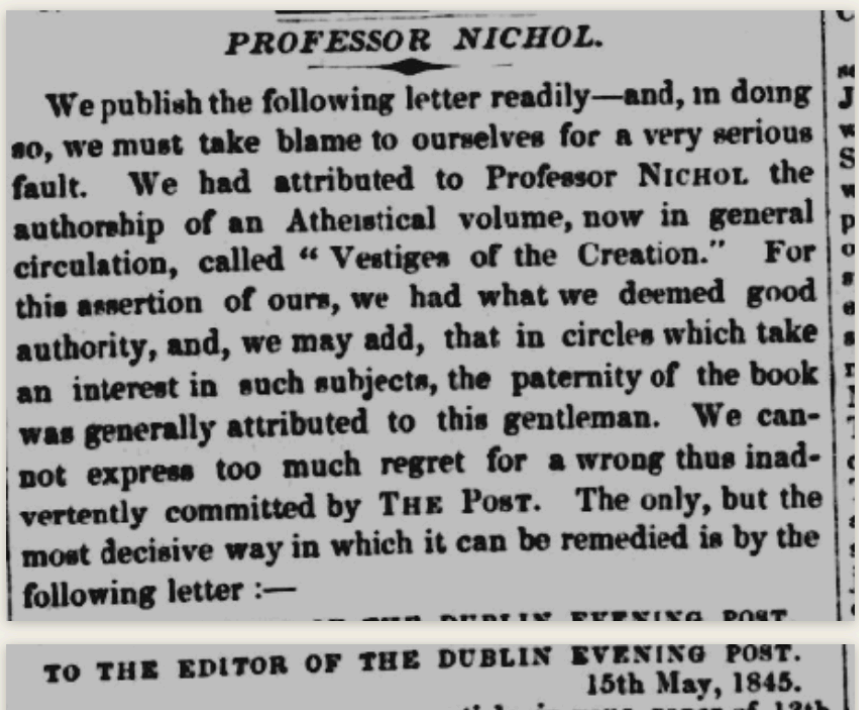
Hide scans

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Original scans Close ×



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15th May, 1845.

Plain Old Text solves:

1. the problem of **Verifiability**
2. the problem of **Pointability**


Thanks for posting the link
15"Professor Nichol," *Dublin Evening Post*, May 17, 1845, https://sources.vjbe.net/stable/x1aj5.

https://plainoldtext.vjbe.net

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2. ~~The Solution: Plain Old Text~~
3. **How does it work?**
4. How does it compare to other online historical archives?
5. How did I make it?


PLAIN OLD TEXT
CATALOGUE
ABOUT
CONTRIBUTE
SEARCH THE ARCHIVE
Titles, newspapers, dates, text…
/
Filters
19 items
Huddersfield Chronicle
7 May, 1898
Jules Verne
M. Jules Verne shares—in a minor degree, with Shakespeare the gift of being able to form a faithful conception of things he has not seen, and thus to avoid the errors into which so exuberant a fancy as he possesses might well have led him. It is
4 min read
READ →
East Kent Gazette
28 May, 1887
Coughing in Church
A northern newspaper lately contained a computation of the coughs in a congregation in Scotland during divine service, and the figures rose to thousands. Writing on the subject for the perusal of his congregation, Dr. Donald Fraser says:—
COUGHING IN
1 min read
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The Lancet
27 Aug, 1864
The Museum Nuisance
We again direct attention to the public nuisances, termed "Anatomical Museums," which congregate in our leading thoroughfares the immoral and depraved. Under the pretext of informing the popular mind on questions of physio-
5 min read
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SEARCH THE ARCHIVE

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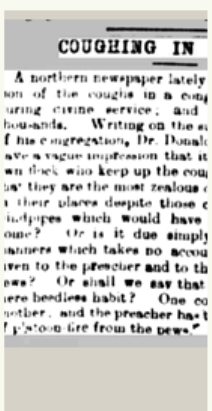
Filters

2 of 19 items

East Kent Gazette — 28 May, 1887

Coughing in Church

A northern newspaper lately contained a computation of the coughs in a congregation in Scotland during divine service, and the figures rose to thousands. Writing on the subject for the perusal of his congregation, Dr. Donald Fraser says:—


COUGHING IN

A northern newspaper lately

1 min read READ →

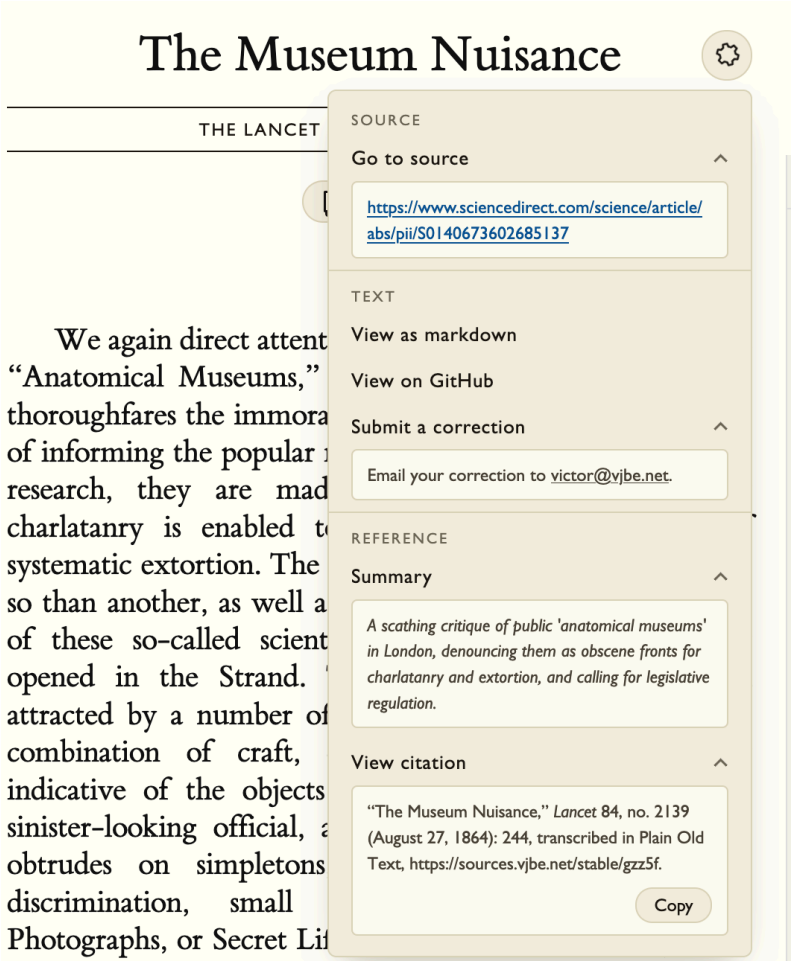
The Lancet — 27 Aug, 1864

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fessor, who manifests a marked

5 min read READ →


The Museum Nuisance
THE LANCET
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Go to source
https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0140673602685137
TEXT
View as markdown
View on GitHub
Submit a correction
Email your correction to victor@vjbe.net.
REFERENCE
Summary
A scathing critique of public 'anatomical museums' in London, denouncing them as obscene fronts for charlatanry and extortion, and calling for legislative regulation.
View citation
"The Museum Nuisance," Lancet 84, no. 2139 (August 27, 1864): 244, transcribed in Plain Old Text, https://sources.vjbe.net/stable/gzz5f.
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transcription usually an afterthought







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transcription usually an afterthought



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transcription usually an afterthought



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Server Hardware



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php.net

Server-side Scripting Language

Server Software



caddyserver.com



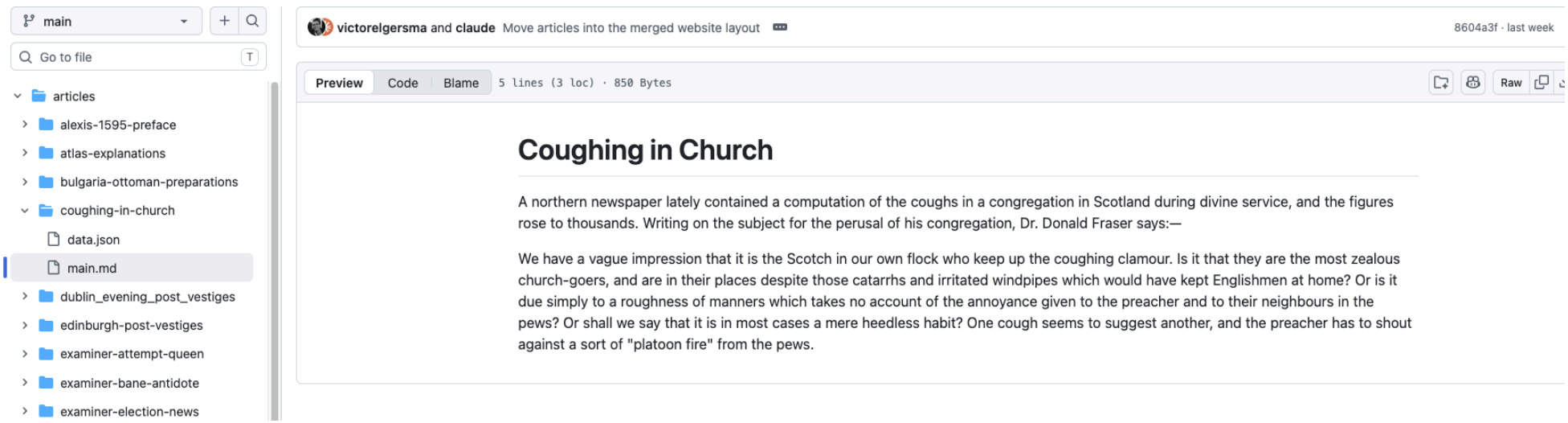
github.com

Source Control

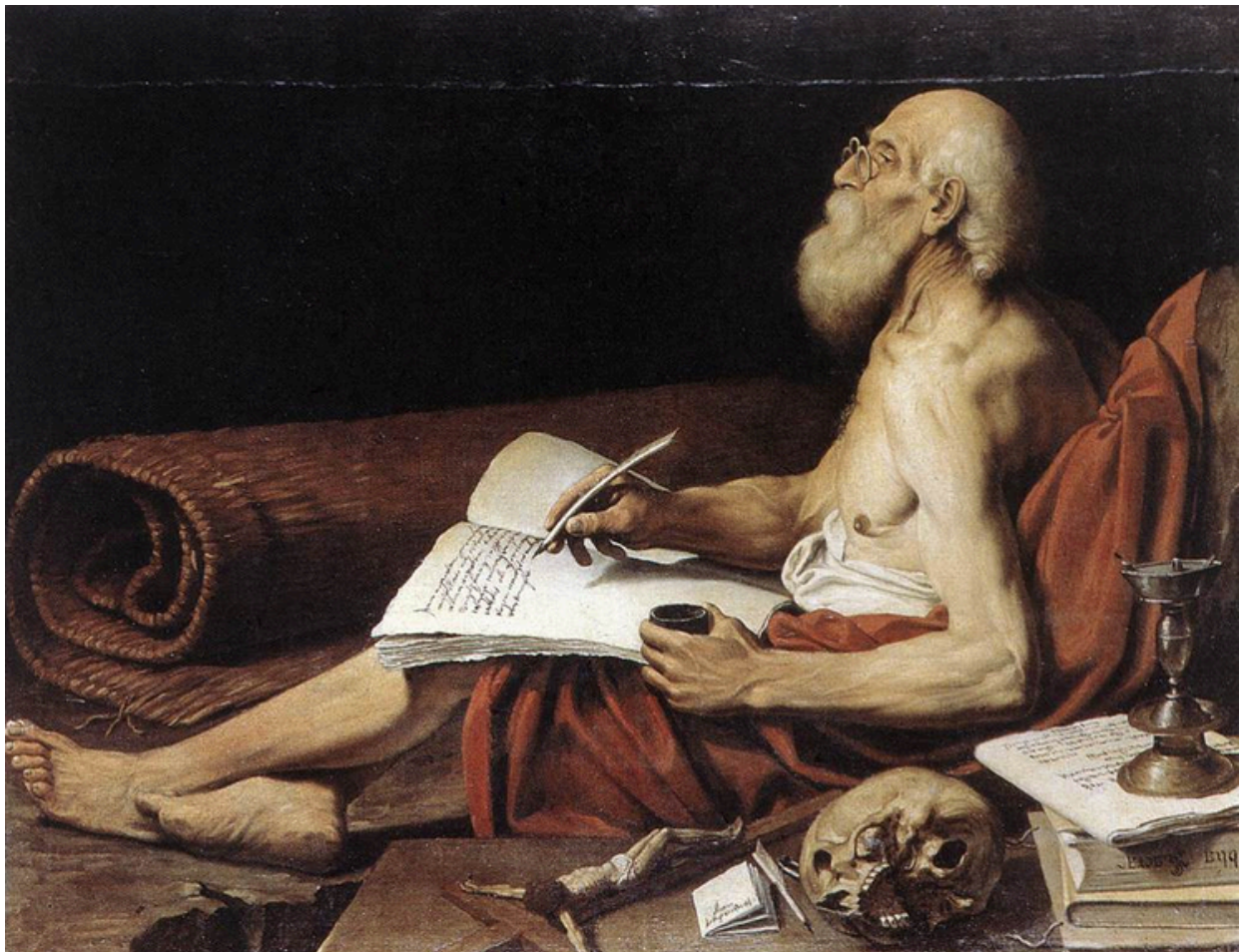
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Coughing in Church
A northern newspaper lately contained a computation of the coughs in a congregation in Scotland during divine service, and the figures rose to thousands. Writing on the subject for the perusal of his congregation, Dr. Donald Fraser says:—
We have a vague impression that it is the Scotch in our own flock who keep up the coughing clamour. Is it that they are the most zealous church-goers, and are in their places despite those catarrhs and irritated windpipes which would have kept Englishmen at home? Or is it due simply to a roughness of manners which takes no account of the annoyance given to the preacher and to their neighbours in the pews? Or shall we say that it is in most cases a mere heedless habit? One cough seems to suggest another, and the preacher has to shout against a sort of "platoon fire" from the pews.


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17 lines (16 loc) · 591 Bytes
Raw
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]
}



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