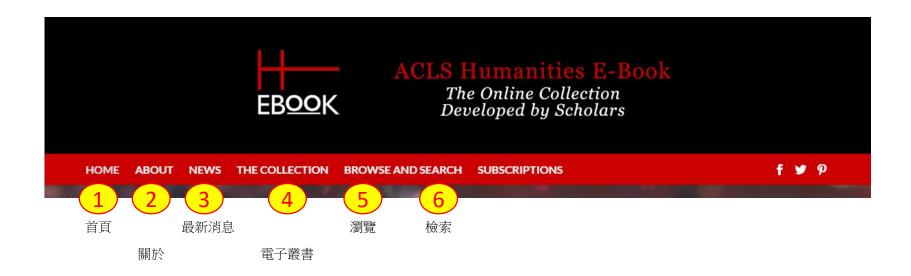


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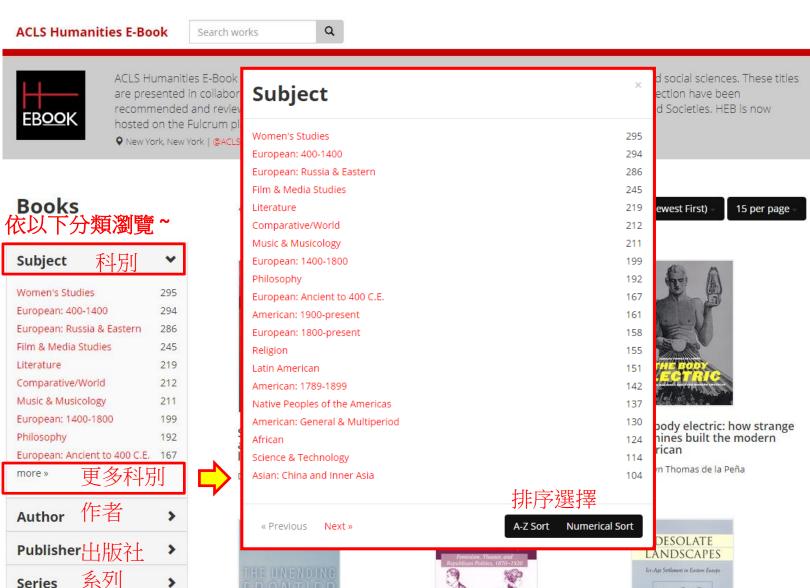
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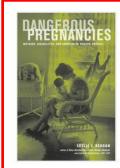
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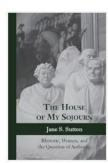


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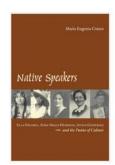
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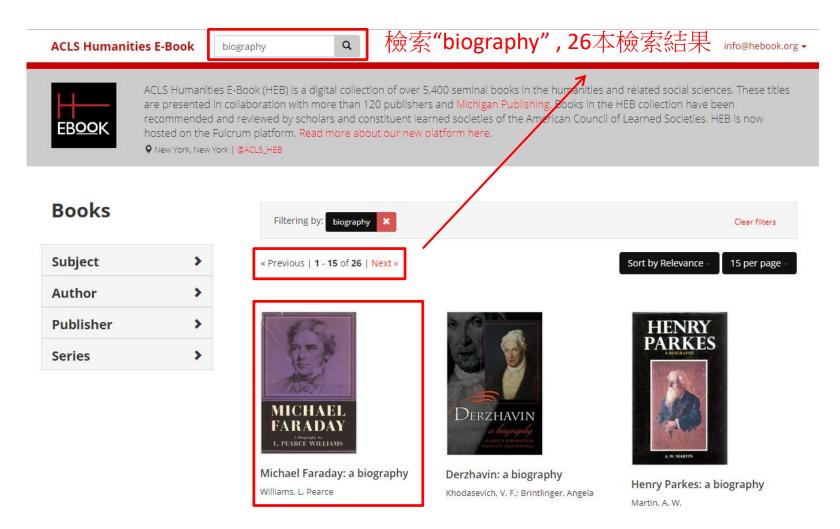
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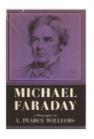


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CHAPTER TWO

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1. The Imponderable Fluids

The years during which Faraday was attempting to educate himself and endeley

profit from his close association with Davy were ones of considerable turmoil in science. The series of discoveries that flowed from the invention of the voltaic pile threatened to overturn the very basis of Newyman te U Like others fought desperately to preserve what appeared to them to be nothing less than Truth. From this clash of opposing theories and philosophies, Faraday was to devise his own point of view which was to be of fundamental importance throughout his creative scientific life.

The magnitude of the battle was directly proportional to the success of Newtonian science in the eighteenth century.

The publication of the Principia in 1687 brought order into the universe of ponderable matter. From falling apples in the orchard at Newton's home to the stars and planets in their courses, all bodies were found to obey Newton's three laws of motion and to act in accordance with the inverse square law of gravitational attraction. What remained for future generations to do was to carry the insights of Newton's genius to their logical conclusions and extend the mantle of Newtonian mechanics over the totality of natural phenomena.

Even in Newton's time certain effects seemed difficult to account for on purely Newtonian grounds. Sir Isaac himself had wrestled with the problem of light and many of its actions had puzzled, if not mystified, him. Heat, too, caused some anxiety. It was all well and good to speak of it, as Bacon had done, as the intestine motion of the particles of bodies, but since such motions remained undetectable, this hypothesis could not resist the first serious attack upon it. Most curious, however, were the strange phenomena of electrical and magnetic attraction and repulsion. The eighteenth century was a period of great activity in the investigation MICHAEL FARADAY

of electricity and magnetism but the early explanations for electrical and magnetic behaviour were not very satisfying.1

One of the striking scientific achievements of the eighteenth century was the reduction of the phenomena of electricity, magnetism, light, and heat to the action of 'imponderable' fluids which, except for their imponderability, obeyed the rules of Newtonian mechanics. The history of this achievement is a complicated one, for the various imponderable fluids appeared separately and were not seen as analogous to one another until the end of the century.2

The theory of light prevalent at the end of the eighteenth century owed its origin to Newton. The corpuscles of which light was composed were of differing magnitudes, the size determining the colour. These corpuscles were attracted by ordinary matter so that they could be pulled out of their rectilinear paths (or refracted) when approaching a dense, transparent medium. The particles of light appeared to repel one another for when released from their connexion with ponderable matter, they

The mechanical theory of heat was discarded when Joseph Black of Glasgow discovered latent heat in 1857. Black had been struck by the slowness with which snow melted in the warmth of the spring sun, and this led him to investigate the heat absorbed or liberated when a change of state took place. He discovered that when a body, such as ice, passed from the solid to the liquid state, a considerable amount of heat was absorbed without there being any corresponding change in temperature. When the process was reversed, this heat was released indicating that it had always been present, but in a latent form. To Black, a chemist, the easiest way to account for such strange behaviour was to deal with it in strictly chemical terms. If heat were a fluid instead of the motion of the constituent particles of bodies, a straightforward chemical reaction could be assumed. Water could be viewed as a compound of ice and the fluid of heat and steam as composed of water plus more of the heat fluid. That heat was intimately connected with matter without manifesting itself as temperature also became obtrusively clear when the work of Lavoisier focused attention on combustion. Independently of Black, Lavoisier also devised a material theory of heat, christening this fluid caloric.3 Caloric could not be detected by the balance and was, therefore, simply made imponderable. It could associate itself with ponderable matter in chemical combination, in which case it manifested itself in ways other than in temperature. Or it could exist, like water in a sponge, within the material interstices of a body, and temperature would then indicate its state of 'compression'. Caloric

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