

The Catalogue of English Literature Scheme.¹

THE subject to which I am to devote myself this evening is one which has interested me for many years, and I hope I may succeed in presenting my views in a way which may deserve your attention, although I fear that English literature does not give play to such dramatic treatment, nor can it be invested with such human interest, as the subjects of novel-reading or the open access system in free public libraries.

I take for granted that the great public importance of the proposed General Catalogue of English Literature will be allowed by everyone, and I do not consider it necessary to weary you with observations on the necessity and value of the undertaking. My remarks will be chiefly of an historical and practical character. After having reviewed the history of the scheme, as it has been from time to time before our Association and the kindred Bibliographical Society, I propose to draw attention to the materials ready for use, and I will then briefly submit to you what I think the Association might undertake.

(I) WHAT HAS BEEN DONE BY THE LIBRARY ASSOCIATION AND BY THE BIBLIOGRAPHICAL SOCIETY.

In the introduction to the *Transactions and Proceedings of the Conference of Librarians held in London, October, 1877* (London, 1878, large 8vo., p. x.), with reference to a resolution then carried, I ventured to state that "it may be hopefully expected that the new Library Association of the United Kingdom will take the necessary measures to effect that vast undertaking in a complete and scientific manner." More than seventeen years have passed, and it may be said, to the honour of the Association, that whatever steps have been taken have been made with much deliberation.

The resolution moved by Mr. Cornelius Walford, and seconded by Mr. W. E. A. Axon, was to this effect: "That,

¹ Read at a monthly meeting of the Association, London, February, 1895.

recognising the urgent necessity for a General Catalogue of English Literature, this Conference recommends to the Council of the Association that steps be taken forthwith to prepare such a catalogue, and leaves all details to the Council." The subject had already been brought before the Conference by Mr. Walford in a paper on "A New General Catalogue of English Literature."

Mr. Walford, as many of us remember, was specially interested in the subjects of insurance and vital statistics, and collected for the compilation of his well-known "Encyclopædia" (unfortunately still incomplete) a very extensive and curious library. His views on the essentials of a general catalogue of English literature were much coloured by his special requirements, but he was a thoroughly practical man, and many of his suggestions were excellent. He proposed that libraries and private collectors should co-operate in making the catalogue on a certain plan, that the titles should be drawn up on slips of a uniform size, and that the following information should be given:—1, date; 2, which edition; 3, name and title of author; 4, full title of book; 5, place of publication; 6, name of publisher; 7, name of printer; 8, size; 9, number of pages; 10, enumeration of plates or plans. A distinctive number to indicate the library which contributed the title was to mark each slip. Mr. Walford thought the subject of the book should be noted, in order to arrange the slip, if necessary, in classified order, so as to form a subject catalogue.

A sub-committee was appointed, and they presented a report to the Oxford Meeting in 1878, when their recommendations were adopted. The Committee were of opinion—

(1) That the general catalogue of English literature should consist of an alphabetical catalogue under authors' names, to be followed by class bibliographies or subject-indexes.

(2) That it should comprehend all books printed in English, either in the United Kingdom or abroad, including pamphlets, broadsides, newspapers, periodicals, together with translations of foreign works, but not editions in foreign languages, even with brief English notes.

(3) That it should be brought down to the latest possible dates.

(4) That titles should be abridged, but the abridgment should be indicated.

A correspondence was carried on between the authorities of the British Museum and the hon. secretaries of the Library Association with a view to induce the trustees of that institution

to take some share in the task, but the result was a polite refusal of the trustees to commit themselves.

Long before the Library Association was in being, the late Mr. Dilke made certain suggestions in a series of five articles on the British Museum Report in the *Athenæum* (see May 11, 1850) for a general catalogue of literature. This is, of course, a much more gigantic business than the comparatively modest task which the Library Association has so long been talking about. A specimen of such a general catalogue (full of extraordinary errors) was printed by Sir Henry Cole in 1875, and later on the Prince of Wales requested the Council of the Society of Arts to ascertain what would be the cost of producing a catalogue of all books printed in the United Kingdom to the year 1600. Certain members of the Library Association Committee gave evidence before the Society of Arts in 1878, and a digest of their remarks was appended to the report submitted to the Oxford Meeting. On the same occasion, Mr. Cornelius Walford read another paper, "Some Practical Points in the Preparation of a General Catalogue of English Literature," in which he took a still wider view of what such a catalogue should contain. He would have included books in Latin, Norman-French, broadsides, fly-sheets, advertisements, tradesmen's circulars, time-tables, and, in fact, all printed matter.

The Society of Arts published their report in 1879, and recommended that the Government should be approached with a view of printing a catalogue of all the books in the British Museum down to the year 1878. As we know, the British Museum subsequently undertook the gigantic task of printing the accessions to their general catalogue. This gradually developed into reprinting the whole alphabet of new and old entries, so that owners of that work have, with one or two breaks in the alphabet, a complete printed catalogue of the contents of the British Museum down to certain dates. It is, of course, the largest printed catalogue ever published by any country, and it is the nearest approach yet made to a *General Catalogue of English literature*.

The General Catalogue Committee presented a report to the Annual Meeting in 1880, and mentioned that steps had been taken to compile a specimen. This was attempted by our late friend E. C. Thomas, who took the letter Q in hand, and left the work in a certain state of preparation.

The question remained dormant—not moribund, I hope—for twelve years, until the Paris Meeting in 1892, when two important papers read, both by distinguished members. These were “The British Museum Catalogue as the Basis of an Universal Catalogue,” by Dr. Richard Garnett, and “A Co-operative Catalogue of English Literature to 1640,” by Mr. T. G. Law.

Dr. Garnett says of the universal catalogue that it could, no doubt, be achieved “by a sufficiently numerous body of competent persons working under efficient control, guided by fixed rules, and influenced by such considerations in the shape of salary and pension as to induce them to devote their lives to it. There is not, however, the least probability of the endowment of such a college of cataloguers.” “My recommendation,” continues Dr. Garnett, “to those who desire to see a universal catalogue—as all do in theory—is to accept this confessedly important catalogue as a temporary substitute, and labour to perfect it by the co-operation of the principal libraries throughout the world, not by reconstruction, which would introduce confusion and delay the undertaking indefinitely, but by the simple addition of such books in their possession as the British Museum Catalogue does not embrace.”

Mr. Law's proposal was to make the British Museum catalogue of books printed before 1640 the basis of a general co-operative catalogue. As regards the probable extent of the additions which might be made to this catalogue, Mr. Law gives some interesting facts which agree generally with my own estimate. Mr. Rae Macdonald, of the Edinburgh Bibliographical Society, has made slips of 260 books in the Advocates' Library, printed in Scotland before 1640. Of these, 100 are not in the British Museum at all, and 20 others are represented by editions which are not in the Museum. The catalogue of the Lincoln Cathedral Library contains about ninety titles not represented in the Museum, and none of these ninety are duplicates of the 120 Scottish books of the Advocates' Library.

A resolution was passed requesting the Council to take steps in the direction indicated, but no great progress has, I think, yet been made.

The subject of bibliography is one to which, under its constitution, the Library Association is supposed to devote special attention, and it is a matter of regret to me that this study has not formed a more prominent feature of our pro-

grammes. The Bibliographical Society was established in 1892 to meet the want, and in December, 1892, Mr. H. B. Wheatley read an excellent paper on "*The Present Condition of English Bibliography and Suggestions for the Future.*" He referred to the proposals of the Library Association, and thought that their wish to include all books printed in English, either in the United Kingdom or abroad, was too wide a rule. He was of opinion that the works of authors that has been considered worthy of reproduction in England should be included. Briefly, Mr. Wheatley thought we should follow the system of Watt and Allibone rather than that of Lowndes, and make our bibliography of English literature a bibliography of authors rather than a catalogue of books. A second part might consist of an index of subjects and of anonymous books. Mr. Wheatley included manuscripts, portraits, and articles and books about the author in a specimen he submitted devoted to John Evelyn.

There is another plan which, as regards early books, is to take the printer as the author, and this, being the system of Ames, Watt, and Dibdin, possesses many advantages. Mr. Gordon Duff, whose knowledge of this department is unrivalled, has drawn up a hand list of the productions of early English printers, and has been good enough to put at the disposition of the Bibliographical Society the articles, Wynkyn de Worde, Julian Notary, R. and W. Faques, John Skot. Other lists are in preparation by various members of the Society of the books printed by the Rastells, the Coplands, Robert Wyer, Berthelet, Grafton, and others. While we have been asleep the Bibliographical Society has made a commencement. The earlier field, from 1476 to 1500, may be said to be already in the possession of Mr. Gordon Duff, who, it is hoped, may soon produce his long-promised *Catalogue of English Incunabula*. To the Bibliographical Society may well be left the period from 1500 to 1556. The plan of the Society is first to inquire where the books may be found, and afterwards to proceed to describe them. Various members have agreed to help in the compilation of a series of hand lists, giving the short titles, arranged chronologically, of all the known books from English presses during the first half of the sixteenth century. The subsequent description, in a full and scientific manner, will provide occupation for many years.

II.—THE MATERIALS FOR THE WORK.—While the bibliography of modern English literature is in a very unsatisfactory

condition, earlier periods are better provided for than is the case with the literature of perhaps any other language. The first attempt to compile an English catalogue was that by Maunsell in his *Catalogue of English Printed Books*, 1595. Another list of English and Latin books was issued anonymously in 1631, and the *Catalogue of the most vendible books in England orderly and alphabetically digested* by William London, a publisher of Newcastle in 1658-60. R. Clavell produced his *General Catalogue of books printed in England since the dreadful fire of London* (1673). William Bent came out with his *General Catalogue* (1802), subsequently continued to later times as the *London Catalogue*, and the *British and English Catalogues* of Sampson Low. These are all mere trade catalogues; the foundation-stone of English bibliography is the *Typographical Antiquities* of Joseph Ames, produced in 1749, in one volume quarto, and enlarged to three volumes by William Herbert in 1785-6-90. Dibdin commenced a new edition "considerably augmented both in the memoirs and number of books," but stopped when he had described only about 3,000 works, and had got down as far as the year 1580. Watt's *Bibliotheca Britannica* (1824) includes other literatures besides that of this country and, especially on account of its great subject index, is still of much value. The *Bibliographer's Manual* of Lowndes, much improved by H. G. Bohn (1864), or those who worked under this name, in spite of errors and omissions, is still the most valuable instrument at the disposition of the British bibliographer. Allibone's *Dictionary* and its valuable supplement by J. F. Kirk is chiefly useful from the literary point of view, while Mr. Hazlitt's *Handbook and Collections and Notes*, now made accessible by an excellent index, are a great mass of materials for the future, and probably unborn editor of "Lowndes." I have so far mentioned general catalogues only, but the labours of Leland, Bishop Bale, Pits, Anthony Wood, Gerard Langbaine, Bishop Tanner, William Oldys, James Savage, Rev. William Beloe, William Bowyer, the Nichols family, John Payne Collier, J. O. Halliwell Philipps, Rev. T. Corser, and others, all form a great corpus of information which await the compilers of the *General Catalogue of English Literature*. A very important step taken in this direction was the publication, twelve years ago, of the *Catalogue of Books in the British Museum printed in England, Scotland, and Ireland, and of Books in English printed abroad to the year 1640*. Printed by order of the Trustees, London, 1884, 3 vols., 8vo., price

£1 10s. The catalogue presents itself in the shape of 3 demy 8vo volumes extending to 1,787 pages. The titles are given in full, but with omissions here and there. It is a matter of regret that the catalogue was compiled from the basis of the old slips, and not direct from the books anew. Some of the cataloguings are more than one hundred years old. The whole alphabet was brought into conformity with the modern cataloguing rules and printers' names given. The entries number about 25,000, and the main titles about 14,000. A subject index and lists of printers are added to the third volume. It is, of course, interesting to enquire how far this catalogue represents a complete catalogue of English literature to that date, and it would probably be not far wrong to reckon that the British Museum had in 1884 only about half the number of known English books. In a notice of this catalogue contributed by me to the *Library Chronicle*, vol. 2, 1885, p. 63, I concluded by saying "a new edition of this work will be wanted before long. Why cannot the five great libraries which enjoy the privileges of the Copyright Act—the Museum, Oxford, Cambridge, Edinburgh, and Dublin—unite in the production of a joint catalogue, in which the books owned by each library might be indicated in some significant manner?"

Had it been possible to carry out this suggestion, such a collective catalogue would probably have included at least 80 per cent. of all English known books down to the date (1640), leaving to some ingenious person the task of compiling a catalogue of such books not in either of one of the great five libraries.

The *Dictionary of National Biography*, of which the first volume appeared in 1885, ought to have made it unnecessary to consider the question of a general catalogue of English literature, but, unfortunately, it was found impossible to append to each article, as might have been wished, a complete and bibliographically-accurate list of all the publications of the authors whose lives were therein given. To me it is almost impossible to dissociate biography, literary history, and bibliographical research, and to separate investigation into the questions of anonymous and pseudonymous books, dates of editions, matters of editorship, and so forth, from an inquiry into the history of the author's life. It has, therefore, been a subject of extreme regret to me that the conductors of the Dictionary have found it necessary to treat this part of their great work less thoroughly than might have been hoped.

In this rapid glance at the chief materials, I have not alluded to the printed catalogues of large libraries, such as the catalogues of the Bodleian, the Advocates, and Signet Libraries, the Library of Trinity College, Dublin, Maitland's list of books at Lambeth, Mr. Sinker's list, the catalogues of private libraries, such as the *Bibliotheca Spenceriana*, the Chatsworth Catalogue, the Huth Library, and many others; and special bibliographies, such as Blades's *Life of Caxton* and Halkett and Laing's *Dictionary*. A meagre record of the literature of the nineteenth century, is to be found in the various volumes of the *London Catalogue*, the *Publishers' Circular*, and the *Bookseller*. American literature (*i.e.*, English literature printed in the United States) is better provided for in the *American Catalogue* and in the *American Publishers' Weekly*. Nor have I yet spoken of the famous registers of the Company of Stationers, which extend to upwards of 170 folio volumes, dating from 1552 to the present day, with only two breaks, the one in the 15th century, the other between the close of the 17th and the beginning of the 18th centuries. There are many lacunæ and other deficiencies in this noble catalogue of our literary inheritance, but no other country can show an almost unbroken record such as that kept up by the Stationers' Company for nearly three centuries and a half. All the important entries between 1554 and 1640 have been made accessible by Mr. Arber in his great work, *A Transcript of the Registers of the Company of Stationers of London, 1554-1640* (London, 1875-94, 5 vols. 4to). The recently published index volume contains a valuable bibliographical summary for the period from 1555 to 1603, and it is to be hoped that Mr. Arber may be encouraged to continue his task down to 1640. In a paper I read before the members of the Bibliographical Society in April, 1893, I submitted certain proposals for *An Official Record of Current Literature*. A complete record of all new books, giving full bibliographical details, forms a part of the scheme.

III. PRACTICAL PROPOSALS. I now come to the practical proposals I venture to make. In the first place, I hope all of our members who can do so will render what assistance they can to the excellent work commenced by the Bibliographical Society with respect to the literature from 1500 to 1556. The proposals I have to make do not clash at all with their labours.

We have seen that a great stride towards the fulfilment of our wishes has been made since the Library Association last reported on the question, in 1880. Subsequently to that date, three under-

takings have brought the compilation of a general catalogue of English within the range of practicability :—

1. The British Museum Catalogue of books printed to 1640.
2. The great printed catalogue of the British Museum.
3. The work begun for early English books by the Bibliographical Society.

The weak point in the many excellent schemes which have been proposed from time to time has been the financial. All plans for anonymous and gratuitous co-operation, however well devised, lack the one essential of an initial expenditure of money. The Bibliographical Society may be able to induce a small number of students to occupy themselves with individual printers, but even that work is only in the way of collecting materials.

I make the bold suggestion that the Council should authorise the expenditure of a considerable sum of money in the shape of an annual grant ranging over some years, in order to put into shape, in a rough but systematic fashion, the extensive materials already accessible, to which I have previously alluded. This suggestion differs little from that already developed by Mr. Wheatley, Mr. Law, and others, except that I would start with an admittedly imperfect catalogue in the hope that it would lead to something more accurate and more complete.

Two copies of the great printed catalogue of the British Museum and its supplements of additions would, if the English books were excerpted and pasted into volumes, supply from 60 to 70 per cent. of the whole quantity of matter. Another 20 or 25 per cent. might reasonably be added from the works of Ames, Lowndes, Allibone, the Dictionary of National Biography, and other authorities already referred to. This would probably leave of a residuum of from 5 to 10 per cent. of books still undescribed.

I should include all books printed in English, whether in the United Kingdom, in the Colonies, the United States, or elsewhere, together with pamphlets, broadsides, newspapers, periodicals, translations into English, and should bring the catalogue down to the latest possible date. The catalogue, when completed in this rough way, would be full, not only of omissions, but it would include the same books under several different headings, and it would display examples of all methods of cataloguing, full and brief, and in quality some good, more bad, and many very indifferent. I do not think the labour of

editing this chaotic mass of titles an altogether impossible one, but I think the work of providing the rough catalogue as the basis for more serious and responsible supervision might well be attempted by the Library Association. This is briefly the contribution I respectfully make to the literature of the subject, which has now been before us for seventeen years. The rough catalogue, such as I have sketched out, ought not to cost more than £200 or £300. Do you think it worth while for us to contemplate such an expenditure? When this rough Catalogue was complete, in its many folio volumes of pasted down titles, arranged in alphabetical order, it might be thought desirable to have it reproduced in a more accessible shape. I would suggest that the titles might then be cut down, and the result would be a short-title hand-list of English literature down to a recent period, and I feel convinced that there would be found no difficulty in persuading a publisher to risk money on such a publication.

There would be no profit for anyone, and I do not attempt to solve the difficulty of finding an editor. I am convinced, however, that, if the Library Association would choose to put the existing materials into some shape, the editor would make his appearance, and the Association would have earned the thanks of librarians and bibliographers to all time.

HENRY R. TEDDER.

