Acceptable Free Library Catalogues.¹

IT may be said that the present is an age when haste enters into most of our employments, and into not a few of our recreations also. In literature—to approach a librarian's particular concerns—reference works consequently multiply, and epitomes of learned scientific and philosophical treatises are received with approval. It is manifest, then, that if a busy man's days are too short for him to afford time for the perusal of voluminous disquisitions on, may be, cherished themes, he will be most reluctant to spend time and energy over protracted researches in a library for literature, whether that literature be required for practical or for recreative purposes. All books desired must be obtainable speedily, if satisfaction is to be given by library authorities. In proprietary and some other libraries the personal assistance in the selection of books which is expected of a librarian will insure expeditious and satisfactory service. In free libraries, however, such guidance is not always possible or desirable. Persons are rightly required to make their own selection as far as possible. Therefore a catalogue sufficiently concise and clear to meet the needs of a *clientèle* as varied in expectations as in temper and intelligence. The question is, do free library catalogues as they stand meet all reasonable requirements, and do they serve as sufficient indexes to the contents of libraries? If not: and to judge by many recent examples of the work of the craft, the highest flights of excellence have not yet been reached: when and whence is the prophet to come who will point a way to perfection, and in what direction will changes be effected?

The principles of dictionary cataloguing have been accepted by the library profession, and dictionary catalogues we have in consequence. Some of the reading public, however, are less

¹ Read before the Annual Meeting of the Library Association, Belfast, September, 1894.

certain than librarians of the exceptional merits claimed for this description of catalogue. Voices are at times heard expressing preference for the classified catalogue. Whether this preference is the offspring of prejudice or ignorance is of little moment. We librarians may continue in the superior way, with dictionary catalogues under our arms and scoffings at prejudice on our tongues, the fact will nevertheless remain that people with such conservative opinions come frequently within our doors, and must therefore be considered.

The chief contention in favour of a classified catalogue is that it shows in one place the titles of all books possessed by a library upon a given subject and its allied subjects, and is therefore best adapted for speedy reference by students. This is a virtue of which one cannot but approve, and, to be perfectly frank, the sting is removed from the hitherto possible reply on this head by the recent application of minute book-classification to classified catalogues. If all men were either students following a distinct line of study or readers of fiction, strictures upon classified catalogues would be impossible. There are other classes of readers to be dealt with, however, and these this style of catalogue distinctly fails to satisfy. There are several objections. The one most fatal, to some professional minds, is the necessity for author and other indexes; and this is unchanged, and moreover, unalterable. Authors receive very meagre consideration; whereas in numerous instances the interest in books centres in the authorship, apart entirely from the subject treated. For example: there are persons who, having become disciples of some eminent *littérateur* or philosopher, must needs read every book written by the admired great one, and so desire reference thereto without direction by an index to the several pages of a catalogue bearing, may be, widely different subjects, such as psychology, physics, political economy, fine arts, &c. A catalogue must be pronounced unsatisfactory—except as regards economy of production—if it fails to insure speedy reference for all sorts and conditions of persons. The usually acceptable result, it is considered, a well compiled dictionary catalogue achieves.

On the other hand the dictionary catalogue does not rise entirely superior to adverse criticism. The charge has been brought by library readers that the principles governing the compilation are too scientific and involved for the understanding of simple folk. This plea has been urged against even the most approved examples; and though few professional cata-

loguers would grant the justice of this impeachment, it must at the same time be admitted that the dictionary catalogue, speaking generally, is not absolutely without shortcomings. Bibliographically, the best of existing catalogues may be all that one could desire, and still prove in some important respects deficient from the standpoint of usefulness.

It is not intended to denounce here all other descriptions of catalogue with the sole object of bringing the merits of a dictionary catalogue into strong relief. Comparison has been made between the two styles—by no means exhaustively—merely because it must be allowed that subject entries are distinctly not the least important entries in a catalogue, and also because experience has shown—at least to the present writer—that such entries in dictionary catalogues are certainly lacking in two respects which, if remedied, might possibly dispose of much objection.

Firstly, touching subject-headings having related or allied subject-headings.

In all save a few free library catalogues, the references from general subjects to kindred subjects, if not utterly disregarded, are so inadequate as to render a catalogue only one degree less worthless in this respect than that one from which such references are entirely absent. Such a reproach as this should not be possible. Let the subject "Zoology" be taken by way of pointing out the desirable course. Were references given from this general subject-heading or kingdom to the titles of the several sub-kingdoms and subjects allied, in turn from sub-kingdoms to classes, and further from classes to sub-classes, the whole subject would be so completely covered that difficulties encountered in this connection by the uninitiated reader would largely disappear, and the student-advocate of classified catalogues be in a measure propitiated. It is pre-supposed that monographs upon these sub-kingdoms, &c., are recorded in a catalogue. The arrangement would of course be modified according to the possessions of a library in this department of learning. Similar treatment of other subject-headings, though entailing, it is true, a slightly increased cost for printing, would be well justified by the greater usefulness which would infallibly result. In order to show how a heading not scientific might be treated, I give a number of references to subjects embraced by the heading

Theology.

Systematic and miscellaneous works :

- HOPKINS, S. System of doctrines. 2 v. 1811 ..8° 4138
- PERBONE, J. Praelectiones theologiae. 8 v. 1840-448° 2978
- WILLARD, S. Body of divinity. 1726 f°. 125
- *see also* Atheism; Atonement; Bible; Christianity (Evidences); Creeds; Deism; Election; Eschatology; Faith; Free-will; Future life; God; Holy Spirit; Miracles; Natural theology; Orthodoxy; Oxford Movement; Predestination; Providence; Rationalism; Regeneration; Religion; Revelation; Scepticism (Religions); Science and Religion; Transubstantiation; Trinity; Sin (Original).

Practical works :

- WHITE, H. The Gospel promotive of true happiness. 184816° 1201
- Whole duty of man, The. 18154° 180
- WILSON, Bp. Principles and duties of Christianity. [1761]8° 5156
- *see also* Christian life; Conscience; Education (Religious); Grace; Holiness; Piety; Prayer; Redemption; Repentance; Salvation; Sanctification; Sin (Forgiveness of).

Secondly, in regard to entries appearing under subject heading.

It is not proposed to touch the question of dividing and subdividing, though the point might be referred to at some length.

Only matter of the entries themselves is embraced by the present enquiry. The procedure sanctioned by general acceptance is to curtail entries under subjects to the utmost possible limits; indeed catalogues exist wherein only lists of authors' names and shelf locations are given. First let me show the two following examples:—

- (1) Botany. Baillon, 1120; Bower, 541; Buckley, 994; Holder, 1432; Sowerby, 760; Wilson, 1029.

(2) Botany.

- BAILLON, H. Natural history of plants 8 v. 1871-88 O 1120
- BOWER, F. O. Practical instruction in. 1891 O 541
- BUCKLEY, A. B. Botanical tables for junior students1882 O 994
- HOLDER, O. F. Living lights1887 O 1432
- SOWERBY, J., &c. English botany12 v. 1863-86 O 760
- WILSON, A. The inner life of plants. (In his Life and sense)1887 O 1029

In the first of these examples, entries are reduced to the verge of entire vanishment. I have never yet heard a justification of the method. It appears, to one not in the secret

respecting any peculiar merits which it may possess, so foreign to the generally approved principles of dictionary cataloguing, that one is almost disposed to question—doubtless by reason of one's ignorance—whether a defence of it is possible even to the authors. It seems clear that if an intending reader consults subject headings before familiarising himself with the names of writers, chance, and merely chance, takes him to the right book, unless he chooses to refer to the name of each author in alphabetical succession, until a work of the kind required is found. Even then the first discovered and selected might prove least in value. For instance, taking entries in the list given, by what means would individuals ignorant of authors be aware whether Bower, Buckley, or Sowerby dealt particularly with *practical* instruction in botany? or by what process save intuition could a person desiring information on phosphorescent plants learn that "Holder, 432" was the book to obtain in preference to Baillon or Wilson? The advantages, if any exist, are secret advantages, so the questions must remain unanswered. Much is done nowadays in the name of economy, and possibly the explanation lies in that direction.

I proceed to the second example. Of the variations upon this setting of a subject heading there is no end. Seemingly, most librarians prefer their first claims to greatness by the introduction of some new feature into catalogue *forms*. Some of these features might be praised or denounced according as taste or fancy in a cataloguer decided; the diversities are not material, however, to the present issue. The form and get-up of other catalogues differ very largely from this style, but the *matter* being substantially the same in all, we deal with this as representing the whole series, leaving the difference in *manner* to care for itself.

The method is satisfactory in a large measure, particularly so where principal entries contain extended particulars. Here some discrimination between the characteristics of books is possible. Still, in view of the fact that only those catalogues affording speedy and correct reference will satisfy, it must be said that meagreness is even here a very decided drawback. It is desirable that not only the characteristics of books, but also the comparative values should be defined. By values, be it understood, I do not mean merits. Judged strictly from the standpoint of usefulness—which, as will be seen, is insisted upon throughout—such particulars as the sizes of

books, number of pages, illustrations, and sub-titles, should appear rather under subject than author, simply because the necessity of consulting author entries for these useful particulars rarely occurs to readers. Intercourse with readers has demonstrated this repeatedly. Frequently the sub-title best conveys to one's mind the precise subject of a book, the aim of many writers being rather to secure striking first titles than such as will be accurately descriptive of contents. This fact should receive more attention in the compilation of a catalogue than is generally afforded. Again, it is very necessary that readers be enabled to tell at a glance which in a group of subject entries represent pamphlets and which books. Distinction should be made, and *could* be made without enumeration of pages. There is a point still more worthy of attention than either of these. That is the mention of illustrations. It is very important that an illustrated book should be distinguishable from one not illustrated. At present, taking the heading New Guinea, who could tell that with Romilly's *From my Verandah in New Guinea* a map only is given, whereas Chalmers' *Pioneering in New Guinea* is accompanied by both illustrations and map? To go a step further, not only should it be stated under subject headings that a book is illustrated but, in the case of natural history works especially, mention should most certainly be made of *coloured* illustrations where such appear. One cannot lay too much stress on the last mentioned point, and most librarians, it is believed, will agree that any desire for the introduction of this information into catalogue entries is far from unreasonable.

It may be urged that the additional cost for printing involved would prevent the adoption of such changes as these. Would the increase in cost be at all considerable? If all departments of general subjects were as numerous as those connected with Theology, a sensible increase in the cost of printing would undoubtedly result from the introduction of references. This is not the case. Theology is one of the widest subjects with which cataloguers have to deal. Moreover, it is very improbable that any except the catalogues of the greater libraries will embrace entries of works on all of the departments named in our example. The several innovations recommended are calculated to be much less expensive. We have simply to follow the lead of a transatlantic library to surmount any difficulty in regard to distinction between books and pamphlets.

In the catalogue of the Boston Athenæum library, a lesser type is used for the purpose of showing that a certain entry refers to a pamphlet merely. This method is praiseworthy and might be adopted, not in connection with pamphlets only, but for the entry also of brief papers indexed from collected works. The responsibility for deciding what is a pamphlet and what a book would of course rest with a compiler. The employment of the method need not and cannot pre-judge the value of a work as a literary, scientific, or other achievement, any more than would be done by the enumeration of pages. One admits that difficulty arises. At what precise point do pamphlets end and books begin? Or, is one's judgment to be influenced by narrow gauges and wide margins, sizes of type and thicknesses of printing papers? Varying opinions on these heads might result in a given work appearing as a pamphlet in one catalogue and in another as a book. This serves only as another strong plea for greater uniformity in the methods and principles of cataloguing than has heretofore obtained.

The following example will show what is suggested. It may afford some evidence of the probable extent to which printers' bills would be increased if effect were given to changes in the body of entries as here suggested. The entries are the same as in examples previously given. They are average entries, and have been chosen without any regard for considerations of space.

Botany.

— BAILLON, H. Natural history of plants. Illus. 8 v. 1871-88	roy. 8°	1120
— BOWSER, F. O. Practical instruction in. 1891	sm. 8°	541
— BUCKLEY, A. B. Botanical tables for junior students. 3 sheets. 1832	sm. 8°	994
— HOLDER, O. F. Living lights: phosphorescent vegetables. Illus. 1887	sm. 8°	1432
— SOWERBY, J., &c. English botany. Illus. (col.) 12 v. 1863-86	roy. 8°	760
— WILSON, A. The inner life of plants. Illus. 1887	sm. 8°	1029

The difference in the space covered by the above and my second example is trifling; yet it means much to those consulting catalogues. Improvement may even yet be possible in the composition of subject-headings. In other directions there is distinctly room for improvement in dictionary catalogues. When the compilers of free library catalogues will endeavour to work unitedly for the attainment of a general excellence and

uniformity, and less for individual renown, or when the prophet arrives preaching the principles of perfection, then we may hope to achieve something in the way of free library catalogues which will be easy and speedy of reference by all descriptions of persons. In the meantime we may each offer small contributions towards the sum total, without, it is hoped, offending the susceptibilities of anyone. Let it be understood, though, that the basis on which perfection is ultimately raised should not be bibliographical excellence so much as public convenience.

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