The New Cataloguer and Some of His Ways.¹

THE "new cataloguer" is upon us. This *fin-de-siècle* decade has already brought forth a new humorist, and we are now brought face to face with the fact that with him has arrived a new cataloguer and a new science of cataloguing. In the February number of the LIBRARY, Messrs. J. D. Brown and L. Stanley Jast gave utterance to the new evangel, and in the *Library Year-Book* one of these writers has proceeded further to lay down the law on this subject. That Messrs. Brown and Jast believe themselves to be the prophets of a new evangel may be gathered from the peroration of their article, in which they condemn the existing catalogue as a "largely mechanical" production, the work of "devotees of the God of Things as they Are," and call upon these to "don their paint and feathers, and grasp their tomahawks, and get on their war-paint with all possible expedition, lest before they are aware of it their god be overthrown and his altars made desolate."

I do not propose to take up the challenge thus thrown down, although I feel that nothing which has been advanced against the dictionary catalogue can weigh seriously against that form of catalogue as the most convenient for general use, when the work of compiling is done well. My present intention is merely to look into the examples and illustrations given by the writers referred to, and to examine some of the methods of the new cataloguer, and in doing this it may be necessary to travel beyond the scope of the articles referred to.

The new cataloguer aims to give more information than has hitherto been given in his catalogues, and this is undoubtedly a laudable endeavour, yet it would seem to be the merest truism that such information as is afforded in a library catalogue should be on systematic lines, bibliographica¹ in character—cataloguing, in fact, and not criticism or literary gossip. In the article

¹ A Paper read before the Birmingham and District Library Association, at Walsall, April 9th.

referred to the authors propose to explain the titles of works of fiction. Explain them! Why, in many cases, the authors themselves could hardly do that. Try to explain *Red as a Rose is She*, *A Gray Eye or so*; *They Call it Love*, *All in a Garden Fair*, and a thousand others one could enumerate, in which the titles chosen are merely mottoes, such as the older novel-writers used to put on their title-pages in addition to the title adopted, and certainly have as little to do with the subject-matter of the novels as *Twelfth Night* has to do with the play. Yet we are gravely told we must explain the title of MacDonald's *Orts*¹ as "scraps," and Grant Allen's *The Scallywag* as "a scapegrace"; and, travelling out of the region of fiction, the writers suggest that we should explain Carlyle's *Sartor Resartus* as "the Tailor Patched." But when we have done this, does it make clearer to you the nature of Carlyle's wonderful book, and are you very much wiser when you know that "orts" are scraps and a "scallywag" is a scapegrace? Are you better able to understand the title of Miss Yonge's *My Young Alcides* if I take up a line of the catalogue to inform you that Alcides is another name for Hercules? If you attempt to compile catalogues of Fiction on that principle you will have a heavy task before you, and I much fear you will not have greatly benefited your readers in the end.

Some time ago one of the writers of the article referred to gave us an example of a classified catalogue of Fiction, and as the subject is again referred to in this article, we must conclude that he still regards this task seriously, and not, as I certainly thought it to be, a joke. Therefore it is fair to assume that the new cataloguer will give us a list of Fiction in which there will be a biographical department, and we may again, as in the instance referred to, see *Martin Chuzzlewit* given as a repository of biographical information in reference to the late S. C. Hall, and perhaps *Bleak House*, in like manner, as a source of material for the life of Leigh Hunt. Could anything be more misleading? Dickens himself emphatically disclaimed any intention of regarding "Harold Skimpole" as the original of Hunt, having merely done what other novelists have done with people and places—that is, to select a characteristic feature here or there, from this man or that place, and blend these with other totally different characteristics, so that when the character or locality makes its

¹ Not *A Dish of Orts*, as given in the article.

appearance in the novel it becomes as fictitious as the rest of the work. To brand S. C. Hall or Leigh Hunt in our catalogues by associating them with "Pecksniff" and "Skimpole" is to do that which Dickens himself most deprecated. But assuming the desirability of so doing, how is it to be done? In the cases given, we have cheap and easy specimens of this new art, but what of the thousands of novels which could not be summarised as examples of "biographical fiction," "elbow bending" (Mr. Brown's euphemism for "the liquor habit"), "spooks and spookical phenomena," and the like? The authors of the article suggest that we should summarise or characterise the various novels, and they give us a few examples of how to do it. In one of these they sum up *Adam Bede* in two words: "England: Methodists." Would any of you accept that as a summary of this famous novel? If you did not know the work, would such a summary commend it, or give you a desire to read it? Or would it sound more attractive if you summarised it "Temptation: Murder: Condemned Cell: A Reprieve almost too late," as the new journalism would summarise it?

Messrs. Brown and Jast carry this principle of explanation and elucidation into other branches of literature. They say "How many, even of our educated readers, are aware of the fact that *Hudibras* is a sort of satire on the Puritans, or that Firdusi is the Homer of Persia?" There are doubtless hundreds of similar literary facts not generally known, but since the authors or editors have not chosen to record them on their title pages, what business is it of the cataloguer to trouble the reader and swell out his catalogue with such statements. These are matters of literary history and criticism, and if readers want to know these and other facts about the books, they will refer to some good biography of the author, or to a history of literature. And as to the case of Firdusi, one of the worst sins a cataloguer can commit, perhaps, is to adopt the cheap and not over nice method of dubbing a man "the Dutch Shakespeare," "the Persian Homer," or any of the catchy phrases with which second-hand book catalogues abound. There are undoubtedly instances in which a note may be of assistance to the student, as, for example, in directing his attention to matters contained in a book which the title would not lead him to expect; and it will be well for us to reserve our space for these rather than to garnish our catalogues with a multitude of trite annotations of the kind which are so dear to the heart of the second-hand bookseller.

There are one or two other features of the "new catalogue" which I wish to refer to, briefly, which are not brought into prominence in Messrs. Brown and Jast's article, but which seem to me quite in keeping with their methods. In a comparatively recent catalogue of great pretensions (I do not use this phrase in a disparaging sense) we have the new cataloguer in another aspect. He insists on the biographical facts of every man's life, be he subject or author—tells us, for instance, that Joshua was the successor to Moses and died B.C. 1420, and that Josiah was a king of Judah and was killed B.C. 610, and that Isaac Pitman invented phonetic shorthand. But why? Why so much and not more? Why not give full biographies and summaries of the books and save the reader the trouble of referring to the books at all? If the reader wants to know these facts, *again*, he will refer to the books. If not, what is the purpose of the catalogue?

All these "helps to knowledge," under the disguise of catalogues, are open to the charge of telling either too much or too little. The compiler of the catalogue referred to makes a point of giving cross references to various portions of works under separate headings, and gives us a reference under Birmingham to *Alison's Europe*—but with such press marks that it is only useful in Guernsey; he gives half a dozen references under Clive, yet omits mention of Macaulay's famous essay—and the same in the case of Warren Hastings. Hence I come to the conclusion that he has fully indexed and referenced out certain works, but has omitted to do so with *Macaulay's Essays*. He gives hundreds of references to various periodicals, yet surely he has not *fully* referenced them all. I turn at random to Shakespeare, for instance, and find only about ten entries of magazine articles under this heading, out of *hundreds*. Why this partiality? And what is the use of bolstering out a catalogue with stray references to magazine articles on no particular principle, when such works as *Poole's Index* and the recent *Review of Reviews* indexes exist? The compiler had better save the money thus spent in enlarging his catalogue and spend it on the purchase of these works—with them at their command, what more can his readers want?

When we come to the Class List, which Mr. Jast insists upon as the catalogue of the future, we are brought face to face with a difficulty which all who shirk the dictionary form of catalogue have to deal with. Some of you may be intimate with

a large catalogue issued some years ago, in which books were entered under authors only—an author catalogue, with a promise of a subject-index to follow. Now, if you know the catalogue to which I refer, you will remember that the subject-index, when it came, proved to be as the ha'p'orth of bread to the twelve pennyworth of sack. An index in which, under each heading, you got a mere list of author's names, without the least guidance as to the character of the individual works. The Class List described in Messrs. Brown and Jast's article just reverses this, and gives you ample lists under each subject and the most meagre references under the author's name. We have a taste of their method in the following specimen entries :

Cowper, W., 7 [i.e., 7 vols.]
Cross, Mrs. (G. Eliot)
 Essays, 7
 Humour, 12
 Miscellany, 13
 Poetry, 7

No reference to *The Task* or the *Poems* generally of Cowper. No word of *Adam Bede* (that is left for the subject class list, where he summarises it as "England: Methodists," you remember). No word of *Middlemarch* or *Romola*—but these great works are lumped together with others as "*Humour, 12.*"

In this entry I am reminded of another vice which came into existence before the new cataloguer dawned upon us—that of exhibiting the pedantic knowledge of the cataloguer by entering works under the real name of an author who chooses to be known by his or her *nom de plume* only. Not only is this contrary to the best principles of simple and direct cataloguing, but it is unliterary, misleading, and impertinent. Ouida has just administered a well-deserved rebuke to the gentlemen who were fussily discussing how her real name should be spelt, by reminding them that in her books and to the public she was Ouida. Your borrowers will not complain that you have not entered her works under one or other form of her personal name—save perhaps a pedant here and there—but they may justly cry out if they do not find them under Ouida, where they *should* be. This class of cataloguer has in past years hunted down the author of *Adam Bede*, first under Evans, then Lewes, then Cross—while, all the time, these books were being published and re-published as by *George Eliot*, and even her biography recognised no other name in its title. Now, I claim that this was an unliterary

practice. Mrs. Cross did not write *Adam Bede*, neither did Marianne Evans or Mrs. Lewes write *Daniel Deronda*. There was one name, the name by which she will be known to posterity, ready to hand all this while, and her cataloguers were dodging her from pillar to post rather than make use of it. Has this class of cataloguer dealt with Voltaire and Molière in this fashion? Does he enter the one under Arouet and the other under Poquelin?

I am willing to concede that for the sake of the half-dozen pedants he may record the real name after the pen name, and cross reference it at Cross, or Poquelin, or Arouet, but I think when a writer has definitely and finally chosen to be known in his or her books by a *nom de plume* he has as great a right to have his wish respected by the cataloguer as Sir Henry Irving has to resent any attempt to call him Brodribb. Only in one class of cases is it justifiable to use real name, if known, viz., where no pen name is adopted, and where, otherwise, the several works, say of Mrs. Charles or Mrs. Craik, of Miss Manning or Margaret Roberts, would otherwise be scattered all over the catalogue. And even here there should be at least one other entry under the name of the leading novel, to guide the many readers who do not know everything where to find the books of the author of *John Halifax* or *The Schönberg-Cotta Family*, of *Mary Powell* or *Mademoiselle Mori*.

Devotees of "the God of Things as they Are," whatever else they may do, abhor eccentricities. Perhaps they are given to running in old grooves, yet I trust some of us will continue to avoid such *gaucheries* of the cataloguer's art as I have brought together as an example of what to avoid in our efforts to make our catalogues useful to the general reader. Many of the suggestions made by Messrs. Jast and Brown will be helpful to us all, and in thus criticising, in friendly manner, some of their proposals, and others "by other hands," I would not wish to undervalue the services rendered by these gentlemen in their endeavours to improve the existing methods of catalogue-making.

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