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WHAT IS THE POINT SYSTEM?

THIS is a question frequently asked by compositors and printers, and very often the information given in return is of a very meagre character. As all American and some Canadian type is made on the point system, a brief explanation regarding it may not be out of place. For many years printers and publishers found that they could not use to advantage the pica spaces and quads in stock with certain fonts of the same body bought from several foundries, indeed they made the annoying discovery that every type foundry had a standard of its own, and when a font of display type was ordered, no matter what quantity of quads and spaces they had on hand, it was a necessity to order an additional supply. This led to many complaints, and type foundries saw the force of the fault-finding, and decided to remedy it. The one great necessity that arose was to find a unit of measurement, or something on which to construct a uniform system. Having agreed that pica should be the sixth part of an inch, they further agreed that the unit of measurement should be the twelfth of a pica, and that the unit should be known as a point. The prime movers in this movement were Marder, Luse & Co., of Chicago, who lost all their matrices, moulds, etc., in the great fire, and as it was necessary to procure a new outfit they based it on the point system, trusting to the intelligence of the printing trade to take advantage of their enterprise. Other foundries rapidly followed suit, and the result now is interchangeable type bodies from all foundries.

Miller & Richard and Stephenson & Blake, British type foundries, sell considerable type in Canada each

year, and yet there is quite a difference in the pica measurement of these two concerns. In twelve lineal inches there are 72 ems of pica, American measurement, or 864 points. Stephenson & Blake's pica shows 72 ems and 1½ points to the foot, while Miller & Richard's drops to 71 ems and 6 points. From this we find that it would require three six to pica leads to make a foot of Miller & Richard matter justify with a foot of American type, while Stephenson & Blake's would be an eight to pica lead over the mark.

The point system was not introduced too soon, us it must prove a great boon in all composing rooms, especially as rules, borders, etc., are now made on that basis. In connection with this system the following is worthy of bearing in mind:—

Pearl measures.....	5	points
Nonpareil measures.....	6	"
Minion "	7	"
Brevier "	8	"
Bourgeois "	9	"
Long Primer "	10	"
Small Pica "	11	"
Pica "	12	"

This system is generally spoken of as an American invention, but we find from an address delivered before the Leicester, Eng., Typographical Technical Class, that "as long ago as 1841 the system was advocated by Messrs. Bower Brothers, of Sheffield, in the form of a pamphlet entitled 'Proposals for establishing a graduated scale of sizes for the bodies of printing types,' and this firm made strenuous endeavors to induce printers to adopt the system. Other founders, however, failed to co-operate, and the printing trade withheld the support necessary to ensure success. The proposed reform was too valuable to be allowed to drop out of sight altogether, and though delayed for the time being, yet in the long run it was bound to come. The imperative needs of a large and rapidly expanding industry like letterpress printing were destined to urge it forward towards completion. The system is now generally spoken of as the 'American point system,' though, as I have already stated, it was advocated by an English firm long before its adoption in America. Some of our home founders do not like the name, but what of that? If, knowing the advantages of the system to the practical printer, they were yet so wanting in enterprise as not to adopt it, then why complain if the energetic Yankee seizes the idea, carries it into execution, and dubs the system 'American'?"

The British printers and publishers, by persistent agitation, may induce the type foundries in the Mother Land to adopt the point system, and a few such well-chosen criticisms as the above will speed its coming.