

be practically impossible for an individual. His name would be unknown to the large majority of those with whom he tried to put himself in communication, the language of his letters might be unfamiliar to them, his very nationality possibly suspect. Information at first hand would therefore be beyond the reach of private enterprise, and the compiler's chief resource would be the partial catalogues already issued, with the addition of such assistance as the largest libraries could render him. Unfortunately, both the catalogues and the libraries have been shown by experience to be untrustworthy guides where absolute completeness is aimed at, and their deficiencies would be too likely to be repeated in the new compilation. Moreover, one feature that I have ventured to call an essential of the catalogue would be absent, viz. the certainty of its continuation by annual supplements. No individual author could supply that guarantee, without which all the labour expended upon the catalogue would in a few years count for nothing. Only co-operation can ensure thoroughness in the collection of information, and nothing but the undying responsibility of an association can provide for the issue of periodical supplements. The Smithsonian Institution, with its correspondents in every part of the world, is able, no doubt, to frame a list of all the existing scientific societies; but there is no great body, enjoying the same advantage of world-wide recognition, to do for history, archaeology, and philology what the Smithsonian Institution can do for science. In fact, no specialism is adequate to the task of compiling a catalogue of all periodicals; it is an undertaking co-extensive with the whole field of knowledge, and should be the concern of the only class of men making profession of omniscience — librarians. The librarian of a public or of a university library is in touch with the learned of every denomination; he cultivates the friendship of the local geologist and of the local archaeologist with perfect impartiality, and both of them look to him for support, intellectual and sometimes financial. None but he, in any town, district, or province, is so likely to be aware of the local associations of specialists and their publications. He is therefore peculiarly fitted to supply the information that is the hardest to gain. In the great cities the publishing

trade is sufficiently organised to provide complete lists of the journals that appear there. But the provincial publications are not so easily discovered, and it is through the librarians of municipalities and universities that such material for a catalogue of serials can be collected most easily and most successfully. This Conference represents the librarians of the world, and the influence of its name among them should be at least as great as that of the Royal Society or of the Smithsonian Institution with the men of science. If a committee of this body were appointed for the purpose of compiling an international catalogue of serials, it would speak with the authority of the Conference itself, and letters and circulars issued in its name would command the attention of librarians in every country. By constituting the committee a self-perpetuating body, the publication of supplements would be permanently provided for, and the process of collecting information for them would be the same as for the original catalogue.

A last word on the financial aspect of the question. Bibliographical works that are merely retrospective tend to become more and more obsolete with every year that passes, and consequently the demand falls off and the price goes down. But experience has shown that a serial record of publications, which aims at completeness, has a rising value in the book market. The early volumes are not superseded by the later ones, but the whole forms a single work. The catalogue of periodicals that I have suggested would be a publication of this nature. The annual supplements would refer to the original volume and complete it. In fact, the various portions would depend upon one another in a far more intimate sense than the different volumes of a great book-catalogue. The original catalogue would continue to be consulted for current as well as past issues, until the time when the number of supplements had increased to such an extent as to render it necessary to re-cast the whole publication. Meanwhile the work would remain one and indivisible—a standard catalogue, indispensable to every library of reference. The demand, therefore, for the original volume would not cease until all libraries were supplied, and the commercial success of the undertaking would be reasonably assured.

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