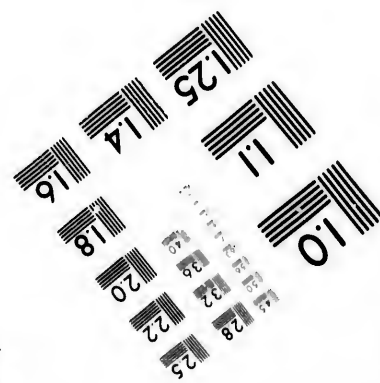
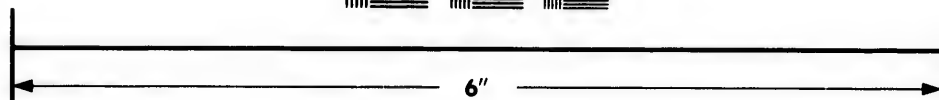
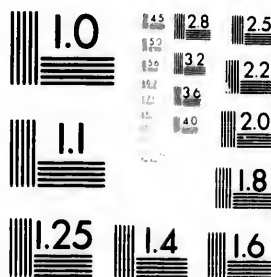
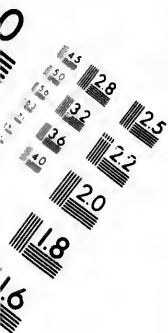


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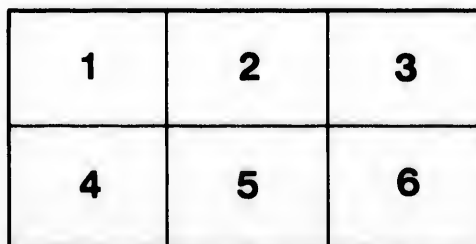
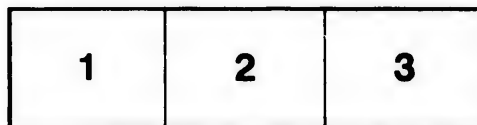
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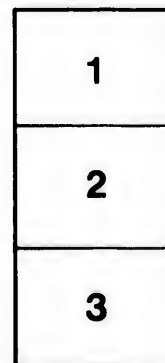
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CO-OPERATION IN A CATALOGUE OF
PERIODICAL PUBLICATIONS

BY

H. H. LANGTON

Librarian to the University of Toronto



*[Reprinted from the "Transactions and Proceedings of the Second International
Library Conference," held in London, July 13-16, 1897.]*

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CO-OPERATION IN A CATALOGUE OF PERIODICAL PUBLICATIONS.



THE subject upon which I have the honour to address you is one of bibliographical as well as practical interest, but it is from the librarian's standpoint, as distinct from that of the bibliographer, that I intend to discuss it. My purpose is to draw attention to the fragmentary and defective condition of the bibliography of periodicals, and to suggest a method of co-operation by which a complete catalogue of serials may be compiled, to the permanent benefit of international bibliography and bibliotheconomy. I venture to hope also that the initial steps to this desirable end may be taken by this Conference. For it appears to me that a meeting of librarians so widely representative as this is, above all things, an opportunity for collective action. I do not depreciate the advantages of discussion and of the interchange of ideas, which constitute the most obvious business of a conference. Librarians as a rule know too little of the stimulus and encouragement derived from personal contact with others of the same calling, and many of the singularities supposed to characterise them as a class, which none of us will admit for a moment, would be cured by mere gregariousness. But, however great the benefits which we as individuals receive from discussion and criticism, there are other important and more lasting results that can be accomplished by united action. An international conference is the highest tribunal of professional opinion that can be called into existence, and its authority may be successfully exercised in a practical sphere where private enterprise or the efforts of a body less influential would fail.

No one who has followed the advances of knowledge in recent years can have failed to notice the growing importance of periodicals, particularly of those devoted to original research. The advantages of association for the purpose of enlarging the bounds of science have been long recognised. With that object, academies of science and learned societies were founded, and their meetings were the readiest means of making known discoveries and of submitting theories to the test of expert criticism. The printed reports of the proceedings at these meetings form the nucleus of that periodical literature of science and research which has reached such huge proportions in the present generation. The principle that underlies the existence of technical periodicals is the same as that which led to the foundation of societies. It still is association, to enable individuals to bring their ideas and discoveries before an audience; but the audience has been amplified, from the mere handful of sympathisers that any one place could assemble, to the whole body of similar specialists in every civilised country. The technical journal is the new vehicle of communication, and to its methods of publication the older academy or society has conformed, issuing bulletins or transactions with the same regularity and with the same object of appealing to a larger public than the audience of active members. With such facilities for publication, it is not surprising to find that every item of original research is now recorded as soon as made, becoming common property and a point of departure for fresh investigations by other workers in the same field. It is also easy to understand that the specialist who intends to keep abreast of the times must have access to all the periodicals in which

the observations and discoveries of his fellow-workers are chronicled, that he may know what has already been done, and in what direction he may most profitably employ his energies. Here begins the task of the bibliographer. It is his business to supply the key to the mass of material contained in all the existing journals, and to furnish an inventory of the publications devoted to each department of knowledge. The natural and physical sciences are the subjects in whose service the technical periodical has reached its fullest development, and valuable guides have been furnished the student of science in Scudder's Catalogue of Scientific Serials and the Royal Society's Catalogue of Scientific Papers. But there are other branches of knowledge in which the scientific methods of observation and experiment are also employed, and in which the scientific practice is equally in force of accumulating the records of research in volumes of periodical publications. The student of archæology, or of history, or of philology, is becoming hardly less dependent upon periodicals than the student of chemistry or botany. In short, every department of thought, every branch of science, every business or trade, not excepting our own, has its technical journals, which serve to store up as well as to dispense the information acquired by many workers in the same field.

But, while periodical literature has been growing in extent and importance, bibliographical information about it has been very inadequately provided. The great desideratum, never to be supplied, is a colossal subject-index to the periodicals of the world. By division of labour some steps may be taken to that desirable and impracticable end. The Royal Society propose to begin a subject and author catalogue of the papers contributed to all scientific journals—a huge task, even if, as is reported, it is limited to current issues. Moreover, by the co-operative industry of American librarians, the general reader is already provided with an index to the chief literary and popular magazines in the English language. So, by degrees, an approximation to the ideal index may be reached. But these are tasks for the bibliographer rather than for the librarian. A far more modest requirement, and one that falls properly within the sphere of library economy, is a simple catalogue of the periodical publications of the world,

exclusive of newspapers and literary magazines. Partial lists have been drawn up, limited to certain subjects, or to a single language; but the need, I take it, is for one comprehensive catalogue, classified according to subjects, enabling the librarian or the specialist to ascertain from a single source the extent of the periodical publications in any department or the details of issue in the case of any particular journal. Such a work would, from its comprehensiveness and utility, be worthy to rank with the great national book-catalogues, as part of the indispensable equipment of every library. We have the English Catalogue of Books, the American Catalogue, Lorenz' Catalogue de la Librairie française, the Bücher-Lexicon of Heinsius or of Kayser, and similar repertories for other book-producing countries of Europe. Each of these aims at completeness for the period which it covers, and each is continued and enlarged by supplementary volumes, issued annually or at less frequent intervals, to keep pace with the constant stream of new publications; so that it may fairly be claimed that no book appears that is not recorded in one or another national book-catalogue. Why should we not also be able to claim that no periodical is issued that has not its entry in a similar international catalogue of serials?

Partial lists of periodicals, I have said, do exist, and imperfectly answer to our needs. There are bibliographies, fairly complete, of material on special subjects; there are directories of learned societies; there are national catalogues of current journals; there are also the catalogues of great libraries like the Bibliothèque Nationale or the British Museum, that contain their thousands of periodicals, supplying valuable bibliographical data not easily procured elsewhere. But these sources of information have no relation to one another. Some are large volumes, some are pamphlets, some are but portions of other publications. Few of them are exhaustive even for their own restricted range, and the most perfect will be rendered defective by the lapse of a few years. Moreover, there are not many libraries large and comprehensive enough to have collected all the available catalogues, and, when all are assembled, it will be found that there still remain classes of periodicals unrepresented by any list. I need not dwell longer on inconveniences that each of us has probably felt more or less frequently. What is needed, as much by

the smaller as by the larger libraries, is a single publication, superseding the variety with which we now have to deal, exhaustive instead of approximately complete, and continued by supplements at annual or other regular intervals. We should then have a catalogue of periodicals as final and reliable as the great national book-catalogues already mentioned.

Let me particularise a few of the essential, or at any rate the leading, principles to be observed in compiling such a catalogue.

I. First, its scope must be limited to periodicals devoted to science and research. To catalogue the newspapers of the world would hardly be more than a bibliographical amusement. Magazines and literary reviews might also be neglected. They merely reflect the taste of the day, and cater to our entertainment without being serious contributions to knowledge.

II. Secondly, classification by subject should be attempted in some way, either in the arrangement of the catalogue itself or by means of an index. An alphabetical arrangement by title, like that of the Smithsonian Catalogue, or classification by country and place of publication, as in Mr. Scudder's and the British Museum catalogues, is simple and readily intelligible. But the simplicity of either system would seem to be in the interest of the compiler rather than for the enlightenment of those who seek for information. The extent of the periodical literature in any department is a question that often arises, and that is not easily answered with the existing bibliographical guides. A catalogue arranged according to subjects would also admit of satisfactory and logical division into volumes, and the convenience for consultation would be thereby much increased. A title-index and an index of localities would naturally be added.

III. Another, and perhaps the most essential, feature of a satisfactory catalogue of periodicals is, that it should be continued and kept up to date by supplements issued at regular intervals. One of the greatest drawbacks to individual effort in publications of this kind is the isolated character that is necessarily impressed upon them. Being issued spasmodically, so to speak, to meet the requirement of the moment, they fail to maintain the place to which their merit and the industry of their compilers entitle

them, chiefly because of the impossibility of providing for revision and re-issue when the accumulation of new material has rendered them obsolete. In course of time a new compiler arises, a new publication is put forth, perhaps on different lines, but with the same fate of premature neglect. The preface to Mr. Scudder's catalogue contains a melancholy recommendation—melancholy because it has been without result—to the effect that a list of additions and emendations should be published in 1880, with decennial supplements thereafter. Nearly twenty years have passed since Mr. Scudder published his catalogue, and no supplement has appeared. The consequence is that, when the next catalogue of scientific serials is issued, all the material so laboriously collected by Mr. Scudder will be re-collected and re-edited, in addition to that which has come into existence since 1876. But supplements at intervals of ten years are not sufficient. Librarians must have information of the latest publications of all kinds. Every year new periodicals are begun and old ones are discontinued, new societies are organised and old ones die. The astonishing growth of periodical literature can only be kept pace with by a system of annual supplements, which should exercise a double function—recording the decrease as well as the birth of periodicals and societies. By this means alone can a catalogue, adequate in all other respects, be kept in force perpetually as an authoritative guide, and its value and utility increased instead of diminished with the lapse of years.

In conclusion, let me explain the reason for bringing up the subject before this Conference. The preparation of a catalogue such as I have outlined is a work of considerable magnitude, not so much from the quantity of material involved as on account of the numerous and widely-scattered localities from which information has to be gathered. It is not merely a question of the output of the great publishing centres, London, Paris, Leipzig, New York, etc. The smaller towns in every country have their local societies,—scientific, archaeological, and historical,—whose transactions are, as a rule, printed and published in the place where the meetings are held. To obtain accurate and complete accounts of these societies and their publications from every provincial town of the civilised world would

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.

H. H. LANGTON.



