

**THE CATALOGUING OF MSS. IN
THE BODLEIAN LIBRARY: A
LETTER ADDRESSED TO MEMBERS
OF CONGREGATION, 9 APRIL,
1890, PP. 3-56**

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The Cataloguing of Mss. in the Bodleian Library: A Letter Addressed to Members of
Congregation, 9 April, 1890, pp. 3-56 by Andrew Clark

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ANDREW CLARK

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The Cataloguing of MSS.

in the
Bodleian Library

A Letter

ADDRESSED TO MEMBERS OF CONGREGATION

BY

THE OUTGOING JUNIOR PROCTOR

9 APRIL, 1890

Oxford

HORACE HART, PRINTER TO THE UNIVERSITY

1890

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*THE CATALOGUING OF MSS. IN THE
BODLEIAN LIBRARY.*

1. I VENTURE to address Members of Congregation on the subject of the cataloguing of MSS. in the Bodleian Library, this being a matter which widely affects their interests and which seems to me to require immediate and careful consideration. I am ready to admit that in some ways it is an impertinence for an individual to put himself forward in such a matter; but I believe that the position of the Library, as the great common possession of the University and the most important of our trusts, is so far above any personal considerations about the insufficiency of the speaker or writer as to justify forwardness in expressing opinions on the part of any one who is convinced that its policy requires to be reconsidered, or at least vindicated. I have also this additional justification, that I have been assured by many Members of Congregation that a full statement of facts, and a detailed expression of opinion, on this subject would be cordially received.

I may premise that the question seems to be one which may be discussed without reserve; since the chief data for the discussion may be collected, as they have been in the main collected by me, from the printed and MS. volumes placed on the open reference shelves in the Library.

I may premise also that I cannot vouch for the exactness to units of the more fixed figures stated in this paper. Some of the estimates have had to be made up from volumes and papers in some of which the reckoning of

numbers was attended with difficulty and in others of which the statements were occasionally indistinct. We are however dealing with numbers on so great a scale that these minor misreckonings may be neglected, as not really affecting the main question at issue. I have also compared my figures with similar figures made independently by another reader in the Library, and found that the comparison substantially confirms them.

As regards the round numbers, a certain amount of latitude must be postulated: I have however in every case indicated the data on which the round number is estimated.

3. General feeling of dissatisfaction with the condition of Catalogue of MSS.

Most students, whose work has led them to consult MSS. in the Bodleian, must have felt after a day or two's experience of the Library that the Catalogue of MSS. is in an unsatisfactory condition. Many students have from time to time given expression to this feeling of dissatisfaction. And last term an important memorial was presented to the Curators of the Library asking them to consider the propriety of instituting a different system of cataloguing MSS.

Few students, however, unless they have either enjoyed exceptional facilities for consulting our MS. Collections as they stand on the shelves, or have actually worked out from the official lists the proportion of uncatalogued MSS. to catalogued and of unindexed MSS. to indexed, can give any precise statement of the grounds for their dissatisfaction.

It is a precise statement of this sort that this paper seeks to furnish. In former years, in the course of my ordinary work, having myself shared in the general sense of dissatisfaction with the cataloguing of our MSS., last year in the course of my official duty I analyzed both the Catalogue so far as it exists and the conditions under which it is being continued, with the result of convincing myself that the existing system is, with the staff available, a bad one,—

that is, one which lessens the usefulness of the Library and is a grave impediment to the progress of learning.

Four points will claim attention, as I proceed :—

- (I) The proof that the Catalogue of MSS. is defective (paragraph 4 sqq.);
- (II) The proof that the setting right of the defects is, under the present system, beyond realisation within any reasonable period of time (par. 23 sqq.);
- (III) The explanation of the origin of the defects (par. 27); and
- (IV) The suggestion of a workable scheme for remedying them (par. 28 sqq.).

3. Number of MSS., etc., requiring to be catalogued.

The official estimate of MSS. in the Library in 1885 put their number at 26,598 volumes: it may therefore be assumed that their number may now be roughly stated as rather over than under 27,000.

For the purposes of an analysis of the Catalogue of MSS., this number must be distributed into four sections :—

(a) *The Oriental*, which comprises some 8000 or 8500 MSS. These are very largely Hebrew, Arabic, Sanskrit, Persian; and in a smaller degree Chinese, Burmese, etc. This section of the Library is exceptionally fortunate in its Catalogues, and may be trusted to continue so. For, clearly, MSS. in exceptional languages will, in the future as in the past, be catalogued in special Catalogues, by outside help, and not by the ordinary staff of the Library.

(b) *Charters, rolls, deeds, etc.* These documents form a distinct section of the wealth of the Library, and require special treatment in a special Catalogue. This a large portion of them have already received in the 'Calendar of Charters and Rolls,' published by the Library in 1878. But a good deal of work remains to be done in this department; and this may form a considerable task for the staff of the Library even after the completion of the Catalogue of MSS. (in the limited sense in which I propose to employ the

word). A large portion of these documents are as yet unbound, and therefore not reckoned in the estimate of volumes. For those which are bound I set aside, as a fair guess, 100 volumes; of which a portion are catalogued in a Library printed Catalogue.

(c) *State papers.* The Carte papers, in 274 volumes; the Clarendon papers (about 11,000 in number), possibly in 100 volumes; Dolben papers, in 3 volumes; the Fortescue papers, in 4 volumes. These also require exceptional treatment in special Catalogues or Calendars. A portion of them have been so dealt with. Three volumes of the 'Calendar of the Clarendon State Papers' (1869-1876) have been published; and, as is stated in the sequel, the Library is contemplating the continuation of this Calendar. A considerable portion of a Calendar of the Carte papers exists in MS.; and is accessible to readers, though without index. The Fortescue papers have been reported on by the Historical MSS. Commission; the Carte papers by Sir T. Duffus Hardy.

In all, this section of the Library contains say 381 volumes; of which say 50 are catalogued in a Library printed Catalogue.

(d) *Western MSS. in volumes.* The remaining portions of the MSS. of the Library may be put together under the general head of Western MSS. in volumes. Deducting Oriental, 8500 volumes, and Charters and State papers, say 500 volumes, from the total of 27,000, we have 18,000 volumes as a rough estimate for this section.

As regards its numerical importance, therefore, it contains two-thirds of the total MS. volumes in the Library. As regards its intrinsic importance it contains all those volumes in Latin, Greek, and the modern languages of Europe, which are of interest to the vast majority of students in the Library.

The cataloguing of the MSS. in this section of the Library is, as I shall endeavour to show, in an unsatisfactory state.

4. I. Defects of the Catalogue of Western MSS.

In what follows these defects will be noted under three heads:—

(A) The absence of a general inventory of MSS. (paragraph 5);

(B) The fragmentary and irregular character of the portions of the Catalogue which exist (paragraphs 6-18);

(C) Special inconveniences arising from the present state of the Catalogue of MSS. (paragraphs 19-23).

5. Defect A. There is no inventory of MSS. in the Library.

When a student enters the Library and desires to find out what MSS. exist of any author (other than in Greek) or on any subject, ancient, mediæval, or modern, he at once discovers that the Library cannot answer his question. To take a definite instance: suppose a classical student to say, 'I wish to survey the MSS. of Terence (see par. 33, § iii) in the Bodleian,' the Library would be bound to answer that, 'with the expenditure of a great deal of labour, we shall be able to set before you most of our MSS. of that author; but, with all our trouble, we cannot be certain that we have given you all, or even our most valuable MSS. We do not know ourselves what we have got, since our indexes are notoriously imperfect; and we have no ready method by which we can find out.'

The inconvenience of this I need not stop to comment on: but that it is experienced, has been frequently shown.

6. Defect B. The Catalogue of MSS., so far as it exists, consists of a number of disconnected fragments.

We have seen that it is impossible to give a direct answer to the question what MSS. of Terence are in the Library; we must next examine what could actually be said in lieu of a direct answer.

The student would be directed to the following sets of fragments, partly in MS., partly in print, partly on one