

ELEMENTS OF BIBLIOGRAPHY

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Elements of Bibliography by Louis N. Feipel

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LOUIS N. FEIPEL

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FOREWORD

THERE has always been an interest in bibliography, but never so widespread and so systematically active an interest as of recent years. Indeed, it might almost be said that bibliography has leapt into importance suddenly. Bibliographical societies now exist in all leading countries of the world; and their transactions, as well as the journals and magazines devoted to book and library questions, indicate how strong a hold the subject has already taken upon the public.

The art, or science, of bibliography has, in these days, attained a high state of perfection, and yet there is any amount of poor or indifferent bibliographic work done. Bibliographies are being compiled by all sorts of persons, many of whom are possessed of no expert bibliographical training whatever. The reason for this is partly that there is no satisfactory treatise on the subject which covers the entire ground briefly and in a systematic manner. The best extant treatises are in foreign languages, and the English contributions to the subject are not well adapted to systematic study or self-training. Nevertheless, the study of a simple, well-prepared manual, supplemented by actual perusal and examination of books of all kinds

and ages, is the only practical way in which to acquire the art of bibliography.

As to the practical value of a knowledge of bibliography there can indeed be little room for doubt. A recent authority on this matter may well be quoted. He says:

In every possible avenue of research or inquiry, bibliography plays an important part. An acquaintance with bibliographical writings, conjoined with access to the best examples, is a kind of master-key which will unlock the stores of knowledge of all ages, and, when used with intelligence, has the power of opening up sources of information which might otherwise be unsuspected or neglected.¹

In truth, bibliography is acknowledged to be a great help to the student, indispensable to the librarian in his capacity of provider of books for all sorts of students, and "the young man's guide and the old man's comfort in the choice of a library." It is obvious, therefore, that whoever compiles a bibliography is a benefactor to all who buy or read or study books, inasmuch as he contributes to the knowledge not only of books, but of the history of literature, art, or science.

GENERAL PRINCIPLES

Scope and extent.—Bibliography, or the compilation of bibliographies, is one of the most important branches of bibliology, or the science of books. It is the chief source of information for seekers after book knowledge, and is as varied in its resources as the questions propounded to it are multifarious.

¹ J. D. Brown, *Manual of Practical Bibliography*, 1907, pp. 155-156.

The word βιβλιογραφία was used in post-classical Greek to mean the writing of books, and as late as 1761, in Fenning's *English Dictionary*, a bibliographer is defined as "one who writes or copies books." The transition from the meaning "a writing of books" to that of "a writing about books" was accomplished in France in the eighteenth century. Bibliography is still sometimes extended in meaning to cover nearly everything in which a book-loving antiquary can be interested, including the history of printing, bookbinding, book illustration, and book collecting. Strictly speaking, however, bibliography should confine itself altogether to the description of books *qua* books.

The ideal of bibliography—an ideal which, it is needless to say, will never be achieved, but which may be closely approximated—is the description, in minute detail, of all the books of the world, past, present, and future, so as to be available forever. Bibliography may, therefore, be defined, as (1) the art of discovering book information and imparting this information to others; (2) by derivation, the great mass of compiled literature which contains this information; and (3) specifically, a compilation of book information relating to a particular person, place, thing, or period. The relation existing between these various connotations is that of means and end—the first constituting the means by which the last two are produced. It follows, therefore, that the perfection of the art of bibliography consists in adapting the means to the end in the most satisfactory manner possible, and in order to

do this a thorough study of the principles underlying the art is essential.

Elements and factors.—The prime requisite of bibliography is the existence of books. A *book* is any composition recorded on a number of leaves bound together in proper order so as to convey ideas to anyone conversant with the form of composition used. Printing is not essential; neither is publication. In fact, some of the most interesting and valuable books have never been printed or published. These are known as *manuscript books* or *inedita*. Large books often appear in more than one *volume*. Certain small books are called *pamphlets*—a vague term usually understood to mean a book of less than one hundred pages, unbound, and devoted to some ephemeral subject. *Periodicals* are hybrids among books, the typical periodical being a serial publication, the units of which are made up of a number of inseparable pamphlet contributions, and which appears at more or less regular intervals throughout the year. Bound volumes of periodicals have always been treated as books; separate copies of a periodical are not ordinarily looked upon as books, except from the standpoint of manufacture and library circulation; but the various articles included in a periodical, when considered separately, are rightfully treated as pamphlets. Indeed, many of them are reissued in separate pamphlet form.

An *edition* of a book is the whole impression of that book printed from one set of type forms or plates. Successive *impressions* of an edition are called *reprints*. A