

LIBRARY CLASSIFICATION

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Library Classification by W. I. Fletcher

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**LIBRARY
CLASSIFICATION**

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Library Classification

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INTRODUCTION

THERE are already in the field many rival schemes of classification for libraries. The present publication is not intended to add one to the number, but rather to offer a way of escape for those who shrink from the intricacies and difficulties of the elaborate systems, and to substitute for painstaking analytical classification a simple arrangement which it is believed is better adapted to be practically useful in a library, while doing away with most of the work involved in carrying out one of these schemes.

There is a certain fascination in the classifying of books, and many efforts have been made to provide a philosophical basis of classification. In EDWARDS'S *Memoirs of Libraries*,¹ a long chapter is devoted to this subject, treating it historically as well as practically, and a comparative exhibit of thirty-two different schemes of classification is given. Many of these are ingenious, and have been found to work fairly well in practice; but the demands of the modern library call for something different, and much more elaborate schemes have been worked up since the publication of

¹ EDWARDS, E., *Memoirs of Libraries*, London, 1859, 2 vols. 8vo. The reference is to vol. 2, pp. 759-831.

EDWARDS'S book. It is generally recognized that modern libraries need a more minute subdivision into classes than was common formerly, and the attempt has been made to meet this need by elaborate logical analysis. But this analytical work, while befitting a classified catalogue or bibliography, is at fault in the actual arrangement of books, for the reason that so many books are of a composite character and so lie across the lines of subdivision. It often happens that with one of these elaborate schemes a large library will have many classes vacant, and in many others only one or two books, while the reader on any of these topics must look to books inclusive of them, but not confined to them, for most of his information.

Classification, therefore, cannot avail to bring together into one place the material on a given minute topic, and yet, in libraries where much is made of classification, readers are constantly led to use it as a means of getting at the literature of a desired subject. For this purpose catalogues, bibliographies, and indexes must always be the main reliance. But if this is so, the main reason for making an elaborate classification is taken away, and it can readily be seen that the time and labor so lavishly expended on it in some libraries may better be devoted to providing more complete catalogues and bibliographical helps.

The object to be sought in library classification is simply to bring together, so far as can be done, the books on each particular subject, for the convenience of the attendants and of readers admitted to the shelves. In a purely circulating library the principal

use of classification is to facilitate the finding of the books, as readers, in placing numbers on their cards, are likely to select several of one kind, and in looking for them the attendant is saved time and trouble by having the library fairly well classified. So far as readers are admitted to the shelves, they also are greatly helped by finding the books on any subject together. But, as has already been intimated, the attempt, by classification, to make books catalogue themselves, — *i. e.*, to have the shelves show what the library has on a given subject, — must always be a failure, and, if dependence is placed upon it, must result in seriously narrowing and hampering the work of the reader or student, who should be referred to many sources of information on his subject which cannot be indicated by the classification.

Take, for example, the subjects of Taxation or Pauperism. It is well to have any two or three books the library may possess on either of these subjects stand together on a given shelf. But the reader is likely to find three-fourths of the most useful material on either of these subjects in general works on Political Economy, in articles in periodicals, and in various reports and encyclopædic works.

As public libraries are coming to be used more for study in connection with the schools, with university extension, etc., there is a growing tendency to thoroughness in cataloguing and bibliographical work, and an increasing number of indexes which render available the material in composite books. With the present marked progress in these directions, it is safe

to predict that the imperfect and unsatisfactory character of the provision made for literary research by any possible classification of books on the shelves, will be recognized, and classification will be relegated to its proper subordinate place as a practical detail of library work which can be sufficiently well done with very little expenditure of valuable time. The writer has heard no demand oftener than that for a simple classification adapted to the smallest libraries and satisfactory until they have grown much larger. The following may be offered as such a scheme :—

- A. Fiction.
- J. Juvenile books.
- B. English and American literature.
- C. History.
- D. Biography.
- E. Travels.
- F. Science.
- G. Useful arts.
- H. Fine and recreative arts.
- I. Political and social science.
- K. Philosophy and religion.
- L. Works on language and in foreign languages.
- R. Reference books.

The books in each class separately are supposed to be numbered consecutively beginning with 1.

As the library increases, and some sections seem to require subdivision, it can easily be done by dividing the numbers in a class, — *e. g.*, assigning to ancient history numbers 1 to 100 in class C ; to modern European

history, numbers 101 to 300 ; and to American history, 301 to 500, or by making more minute subdivisions, if necessary. By means of much less painstaking in this arrangement of numbers within the classes than is required to apply a more elaborate scheme of classification, a library can be satisfactorily cared for until it reaches 30,000 or possibly 50,000 volumes. If for any reason the library is to be specialized in one subject, room enough for that subject to expand indefinitely should be assigned, not only on the shelves, but also in the catalogue and classification. And the different classes of books will naturally be so placed in the room that those most in demand will be most convenient of access, and others in proportion. The order of classes given in the list above will be found applicable to the ordinary public library, beginning with A at the point nearest the delivery counter.

The list of classes which follows is offered as one likely to serve the purposes of an ordinary public library of not over 100,000 volumes, and competent for even a much larger one if expanded by subdivision as found necessary.

As intimated above, a small library may be numbered satisfactorily, with room for expansion, by simply numbering the books in each class consecutively, the classes being designated by capital letters prefixed to the numbers.

In a larger library, with more subdivisions, the classes will be numbered, and the class number prefixed to the book number, a period being placed between the two. In some classes, as in fiction and