SOME OBSERVATIONS ON THE BODLEIAN CLASSED CATALOGUE

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649707782

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Edited by Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd.
Cover @ 2017

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BY

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PRICE ONE SHILLING.

C.
OXFORD:
B. H. BLACKWELL, 50 AND 51, BROAD STREET.
1888.

NOTE.

From the preface and its date it will be seen that these 'Observations' were printed and ready for publication at the end of September last; and I intended that they should be issued as soon as I received notice of the Special Meeting which was ordered to be held early in October. Days rolled on; days became weeks, and yet no notice came; so at last I changed my mind, and resolved to withhold the paper till after the meeting. It was possible that there might be no need to publish it at all. At length on Thursday, Oct. 25, ten Curators met. One member of the committee on the Classed Catalogue moved the adoption of the report (see p. 17), and another member of the same committee seconded the proposal. Then we all talked. I observed that three years ago I circulated amongst the Curators reasons (see p. 6) which seemed to me fatal to any classed catalogue, and that I did not intend to waste time by repeating them. At length we divided, when five voted for the continuance of the Classed Catalogue and four against it, so that my belief (p. 31) was well founded.

H. W. C.

October 25th, 1888.

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PREFACE.

Some may perhaps think that these Observations might more fitly have been submitted to the Bodleian Curators at the ensuing meeting; and there was a time when I should certainly have thought so myself. But the experience of the last year or so has convinced me that it is perfectly idle to discuss any technical matter with my colleagues. They have their own notions with regard to books, and they very naturally cling to them; the consequence is that I can hardly understand their views, and am quite sure that they cannot comprehend mine. Moreover, as I explained more than a year and a half ago (see Remarks on the Practice and Policy of lending Bodleian Printed Books and Manuscripts, p. iv), the Curators have let me know that they dislike my lengthy papers, and no wonder. Even if I read out these Observations, and even if the Curators had the time and the patience to listen to them, there is no reason, judging from the past, to suppose that they would produce any useful effect. It would after all be necessary to appeal to Convocation, so that the simplest and shortest way of proceeding is to come before Convocation at once.

H. W. C.

September 21st, 1888.

THE BODLEIAN CLASSED CATALOGUE.

NEARLY three years ago, on November 7th, 1885, the Bodleian Curators received a report from the Librarian asking for an increase of staff, and a few days later they received from me a printed Memorandum concerning that request in which the following passage occurred: "Who tied the millstone of a classed catalogue round the Librarian's neck, I do not know; but the classed catalogue and all the work which it entails is so much labour thrown away. No real scholar, no man who is capable of literary research, wants a classed catalogue; he hates the very sight of such a thing; it serves no useful purpose; it is a snare and a delusion. The sciolist, and he alone, thinks how delightful it would be to turn out any given subject and there see all the books that have been written on it. He does not know how impossible the thing is, or what mischiefs result from the attempt to compass such a work. Most French catalogues are classed, and he who has had the ill luck, as I have, to consult them, retains a lively sense of detestation for those who were foolish enough to class the books. How is a man, it will be asked, to know what books have been printed on this or that? The answer is that every man fit to be admitted to a great library knows many ways of acquiring this information. Could men of real knowledge be consulted, I am quite sure that a large majority, if not all, would infinitely prefer the alphabetical arrangement under authors' names, to the best classed catalogue that could be devised. Let it be observed that I say classed *catalogue*. Could all these