

Cambridge University Press
978-1-108-02148-7 - How to Catalogue a Library
Henry Benjamin Wheatley
Excerpt
[More information](#)



HOW TO
CATALOGUE A LIBRARY.



CHAPTER I.

INTRODUCTION.

BEFORE we can answer the question implied in the title of this little book, it will be necessary for author and reader to agree as to what a catalogue really is.

The word "catalogue" is used to mean a list or enumeration of men or things. Thus we have a catalogue of students, but in actual use we differentiate the two words, and a list ("a mere list") is understood to mean a common inventory, often in no particular order (although we can have alphabetical or classified lists);

Cambridge University Press
978-1-108-02148-7 - How to Catalogue a Library
Henry Benjamin Wheatley
Excerpt
[More information](#)

2 *How to Catalogue a Library.*

while a catalogue implies something fuller and something disposed in a certain order. What the limit of that something fuller and what that certain order as applied to a catalogue of books really are, it will be for us now to consider.

It was formerly very much the fashion for those who knew little of the subject to speak as if nothing was easier than to make a catalogue. All you had to do was to have a sheet of paper and the book to be catalogued before you, and then to transfer the title to the paper. No previous knowledge was necessary. But those who were better acquainted with the difficulties that beset even the cataloguer, realized that Sheridan's joke about "easy writing being damned hard reading" was applicable to the work produced under these circumstances. Since the discussion on the British Museum Catalogue, and the consequent attention to the first principles of bibliography, these ignorant views are not so generally held, but still many erroneous opinions are abroad. One of these is that the clerical portion of the work of cataloguing or indexing

Introduction. 3

is derogatory to a superior person, and therefore that he should have an inferior person to help him. The superior person dictates, and the inferior person copies down ; and the result in practice is that endless blunders are produced, which might have been saved if one person had done the work.

Another vulgar error is that cataloguers form a guild, with secrets which they wish to keep from the public. This is a grievous mistake. The main object of the good cataloguer should be to make the consultation of his work easy. He knows the difficulties, and knows that rules must be made to overcome these difficulties ; but he does not care to multiply these rules more than is absolutely necessary. The good cataloguer will try to put himself into the place of the intelligent consulter—that is, the person who brings ordinary intelligence to bear upon the catalogue, but has not, necessarily, any technical knowledge. Some persons seem to think that everything is to be brought down to the comprehension of the fool ; but if by doing this we make

Cambridge University Press
978-1-108-02148-7 - How to Catalogue a Library
Henry Benjamin Wheatley
Excerpt
[More information](#)

4 *How to Catalogue a Library.*

it more difficult for the intelligent person, the action is surely not politic. The consulter of a catalogue might at least take the trouble to understand the plan upon which it is compiled before using it.

Formerly it was too much the practice to make catalogue entries very short, and to leave out important particulars mentioned on the title-page; but now the opposite extreme of writing out the whole title, however long, is more common. It should be remembered that in the judicious compression of a title-page the art of the cataloguer is brought into play, for any one can copy out the whole of a long title. I cannot help thinking that this latter extreme is caused by some misunderstanding of the relative conditions necessary for the production of bibliographies and catalogues. Of course catalogues form a section of the class Bibliography; but we understand also by the word "bibliography" a collection of titles of books on a special subject, or belonging to a particular literature.

The uses of a bibliography, either of a national literature or of a subject such as

Introduction. 5

History, are to find out what books have been written, either by a particular author or on a particular subject ; to find whether a certain point is dealt with in a certain book ; or, it may be, to see whether a book you possess is the right edition, or whether it is wanting in some particular. For these purposes it is most important to have full titles, and collations with necessary additional information given in the form of notes. Very often the particulars included in the bibliography will be sufficient in themselves to save the consulter from the necessity of searching for the book.

The uses of a catalogue are something quite different. This is in the same house as the books it describes, and is merely a help to the finding of those books. It would be absurd to copy out long titles in a catalogue and be at the cost of printing them when the title itself in the book can be in our hands in a couple of minutes. Sufficient information only is required to help us to find the right book and the right edition. How far this should be given will be discussed

Cambridge University Press
978-1-108-02148-7 - How to Catalogue a Library
Henry Benjamin Wheatley
Excerpt
[More information](#)

6 *How to Catalogue a Library.*

in a later chapter. It is necessary for us, however, to remember that when the catalogue is printed and away from the library it becomes to some extent a bibliography, and therefore when a library contains rare or unique books it is usual, for love of the cause, to describe these fully, as if the catalogue was a bibliography. This is the more necessary because we are so deficient in good bibliographies. The ideal state, from which we are still far off, would be a complete and full bibliography of all literature, and then cataloguers could be less full in their descriptions, and reference might be made to the bibliography for further particulars. It is a standing disgrace to the country that we have no complete bibliography of English authors, much less of English literature generally.

It has long been the dream of the bibliographer that a universal catalogue might be obtained by the amalgamation of the catalogues of several collections. Thus it was the intention of Gerard Langbaine, Provost of Queen's College, Oxford, and Keeper of the University

Cambridge University Press
978-1-108-02148-7 - How to Catalogue a Library
Henry Benjamin Wheatley
Excerpt
[More information](#)

Introduction. 7

Archives, to have made a classified catalogue of the Bodleian Library, and to incorporate with it all the books not in the Bodleian but in other Oxford libraries, public and private, so as to show at a glance all the books that existed in Oxford. He died, however, on February 10th, 1657-58, without having carried his design into execution. Dr. Garnett, in his valuable paper on "The Printing of the British Museum Catalogue" (*Transactions*, Fourth and Fifth Meetings of the Library Association of the United Kingdom, 1884, pp. 120-28), gave words to his aspiration "that the completion of the Museum Catalogue in print may coincide with the completion of the present century," and he continued that no better memorial of the nineteenth century could be produced than a "register of almost all the really valuable literature of all former centuries." This is very true; but I think that catalogues can only form the groundwork for bibliographies, and are not sufficiently satisfactory to supersede them. Moreover, each country should produce its own national bibliography.

Cambridge University Press
978-1-108-02148-7 - How to Catalogue a Library
Henry Benjamin Wheatley
Excerpt
[More information](#)

8 *How to Catalogue a Library.*

Mr. Cutter divides libraries into (1) those for study, and (2) those for reading; and this division must always be kept in view. We shall chiefly consider the first division, although it will not be right altogether to pass over the latter. Libraries for reading have been rightly considered in the light of educational institutions; and the various points connected with the information to be given to readers, as to what they should read, and how they should read, perhaps belong more properly to Education than to Bibliography.

As to the order in which the catalogue should be disposed we have considerable choice, and Mr. Cutter has given in the *United States Special Report* (pp. 561-67) a most elaborate classification of the different species of catalogues, but the main divisions are the classified and the alphabetical. Years ago the classified was considered the ideal; but when this ideal was brought down to practice it usually failed, and the result was almost useless. The late Professor De Morgan made the following pertinent remarks on this point :—

Cambridge University Press
978-1-108-02148-7 - How to Catalogue a Library
Henry Benjamin Wheatley
Excerpt
[More information](#)

Introduction. 9

“A classed catalogue is supposed to be useful to those who want to know what has been written on a particular subject. Now, in the first place, who are the persons who look at a book list with any such view? Not beginners in a wide field of research. Did any one in his senses ever go to a library to learn geometry, for instance, and take the subject in a classed catalogue, and fall to work upon some author because he was therein set down? This attempt to feed the mind *à la carte* would certainly end in an indigestion, if, which is rather to be hoped, it did not begin in a surfeit.”¹

Again :—

“Any one who is willing to trust the maker of a catalogue, however highly qualified, with the power of settling what books he can want in reference to a given subject, is either a person who consults only the most celebrated works, and has nothing to do with research, or one who is willing to take completeness

¹ *Dublin Review*, October 1846, p. 7.

Cambridge University Press
978-1-108-02148-7 - How to Catalogue a Library
Henry Benjamin Wheatley
Excerpt
[More information](#)

10 *How to Catalogue a Library.*

upon trust, and to content himself with blaming another person if he do not reach it.”¹

It is a common mistake to speak of a classified catalogue as a Catalogue Raisonné. A Catalogue Raisonné is a catalogue with bibliographical details and notes, in which the merits or demerits of the books are discussed. Therefore a Catalogue Raisonné can be alphabetical as well as classified. An alphabetical catalogue can be either one of authors, or of subjects, or what the Americans have styled the Dictionary Catalogue. A catalogue of authors will contain the description of anonymous books under headings in the same alphabet, and it may either have an index of subjects, or subject cross-references included in the general alphabet. But as the rules to be considered later on relate chiefly to the catalogue of authors, it is not necessary to say more on this point here. Again, De Morgan has made some excellent remarks on the catalogue of authors:—

“An alphabetical catalogue has this

¹ *Dublin Review*, October 1846, p. 12.