

Cambridge University Press
978-1-108-02149-4 - How to Form a Library
Henry Benjamin Wheatley
Excerpt
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HOW TO FORM A LIBRARY.



INTRODUCTION.

ALTHOUGH there can be little difference of opinion among book lovers as to the need of a Handbook which shall answer satisfactorily the question—"How to Form a Library"—it does not follow that there will be a like agreement as to the best shape in which to put the answer. On the one side a string of generalities can be of no use to any one, and on the other a too great particularity of instruction may be resented by those who only require hints on a few points, and feel that they know their own business better than any author can tell them.

One of the most important attempts to direct the would-be founder of a Library

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in his way was made as long ago as 1824 by Dr. Dibdin, and the result was entitled *The Library Companion*.¹ The book could never have been a safe guide, and now it is hopelessly out of date. Tastes change, and many books upon the necessity of possessing which Dibdin enlarges are now little valued. Dr. Hill Burton writes of this book as follows in his *Book-Hunter*: "This, it will be observed, is not intended as a manual of rare or curious, or in any way peculiar books, but as the instruction of a Nestor on the best books for study and use in all departments of literature. Yet one will look in vain there for such names as Montaigne, Shaftesbury, Benjamin Franklin, D'Alembert, Turgot, Adam Smith, Malebranche, Lessing, Goethe, Schiller, Fénelon, Burke, Kant, Richter, Spinoza, Flechier, and many others. Characteristically enough, if you turn up Rousseau in the index, you will find Jean Baptiste, but not Jean Jacques. You

¹ " *The Library Companion, or the Young Man's Guide and the Old Man's Comfort in the Choice of a Library.* By the Rev. T. F. Dibdin, F.R.S., A.S., London, 1824."

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will search in vain for Dr. Thomas Reid the metaphysician, but will readily find Isaac Reed the editor. If you look for Molinæus, or Du Moulin, it is not there, but alphabetical vicinity gives you the good fortune to become acquainted with “Moule, Mr., his *Bibliotheca Heraldica*.” The name of Hooker will be found, not to guide the reader to the *Ecclesiastical Polity*, but to Dr. Jackson Hooker’s *Tour in Iceland*. Lastly, if any one shall search for Hartley *on Man*, he will find in the place it might occupy, or has reference to, the editorial services of ‘Hazlewood, Mr. Joseph.’”

Although this criticism is to a great extent true, it does not do justice to Dibdin’s book, which contains much interesting and valuable matter, for if the *Library Companion* is used not as a Guide to be followed, but as a book for reference, it will be found of considerable use.

William Goodhugh’s *English Gentleman’s Library Manual, or a Guide to the Formation of a Library of Select Literature*, was published in 1827. It contains classified

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lists of library books, but these are not now of much value, except for the notes which accompany the titles, and make this work eminently readable. There are some literary anecdotes not to be found elsewhere.

A most valuable work of reference is Mr. Edward Edwards's Report on the formation of the Manchester Free Library, which was printed in 1851. It is entitled, "*Librarian's First Report to the Books Sub-Committee on the Formation of the Library, June 30, 1851, with Lists of Books suggested for purchase.*" The Lists are arranged in the following order:—

1. Works—collective and miscellaneous—of Standard British authors; with a selection of those of the Standard authors of America.
2. Works relative to the History, Topography, and Biography of the United Kingdom, and of the United States of America.
3. Works relative to Political Economy, Finance, Trade, Commerce, Agriculture, Mining, Manufactures, Inland Communication, and Public Works.

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4. Works relating to Physics, Mathematics, Mechanics, Practical Engineering, Arts, and Trades, etc.
5. Voyages and Travels.
6. Works on Zoology, Botany, Mineralogy, and Geology.
7. Periodical Publications and Transactions of Learned Societies (not included in Lists 2, 3, or 6), Collections, Encyclopædias, Gazetteers, Atlases, Dictionaries, Bibliographies, Indexes, etc.

These draft lists include 4582 distinct works, extending to about 12,438 volumes, including pamphlets, but exclusive of 553 Parliamentary Papers and Reports, or *Blue Books*. Such a practically useful collection of lists of books will not easily be found elsewhere.

Mr. Edwards gives some rules for the formation of Libraries in the second volume of his *Memoirs of Libraries* (p. 629), where he writes, "No task is more likely to strip a man of self-conceit than that of having to frame, and to carry out in detail a plan

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for the formation of a large Library. When he has once got beyond those departments of knowledge in which his own pursuits and tastes have specially interested him, the duty becomes a difficult one, and the certainty, that with his best efforts, it will be very imperfectly performed is embarrassing and painful. If, on the other hand, the task be imposed upon a 'Committee,' there ensues almost the certainty that its execution will depend at least as much on chance as on plan: that responsibility will be so attenuated as to pass off in vapour; and that the collection so brought together will consist of parts bearing but a chaotic sort of relation to the whole."

Mr. Henry Stevens printed in 1853 his pretty little book entitled *Catalogue of my English Library*, which contains a very useful selection of Standard books. In his Introduction the author writes, "It was my intention in the outset not to exceed 4000 volumes, but little by little the list has increased to 5751 volumes. I have been considerably puzzled to know what titles

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to strike out in my next impression, being well aware that what is trash to one person is by no means such to another; also that many books of more merit than those admitted have been omitted. You may not think it difficult to strike out twenty authors, and to add twenty better ones in their place, but let me relate to you a parable. I requested twenty men, whose opinions on the Literary Exchange are as good as those of the Barings or the Rothschilds on the Royal, each to expunge twenty authors and to insert twenty others of better standing in their places, promising to exclude in my next impression any author who should receive more than five votes. The result was, as may be supposed, not a single expulsion or addition."

In 1855 Mons. Hector Bossange produced a companion volume, entitled *Ma Bibliothèque Française*. It contains a select list of about 7000 volumes, and is completed with Indexes of Subjects, Authors, and Persons.

For helpful Bibliographical Guides we

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often have to look to the United States, and we do not look in vain. A most useful Handbook, entitled *The Best Reading*, was published in 1872 by George P. Putman, and the work edited by F. B. Perkins is now in its fourth edition.¹ The books are arranged in an alphabet of subjects, and the titles are short, usually being well within a single line. A very useful system of appraisal of the value of the books is adopted. Thus: *a*, means that the book so marked is considered *the* book, or as good as any, *at a moderate cost*; *b* means, in like manner, the best of the more elaborate or costly books on the subject. In the department of FICTION, a more precise classification has been attempted, in which a general idea

¹ *The Best Reading*: Hints on the Selection of Books; on the Formation of Libraries, Public and Private; on Courses of Reading, etc., with a Classified Bibliography for every reference. Fourth revised and enlarged edition, continued to August, 1876, with the addition of Select Lists of the best French, German, Spanish, and Italian Literature. Edited by Frederic Beecher Perkins; New York, G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1881. Second Series, 1876 to 1882, by Lynds E. Jones.

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of the relative importance of the *authors* is indicated by the use of the letters *a*, *b*, and *c*, and of the relative value of their several works by the asterisks * and **.”

Having noted a few of the Guides which are now at hand for the use of the founders of a library, we may be allowed to go back somewhat in time, and consider how our predecessors treated this same subject, and we can then conclude the present Introduction with a consideration of the less ambitious attempts to instruct the book collector which may be found in papers and articles.

One of the earliest works on the formation of a library was written by Bishop Cardona, and published at Tarragona in 1587, in a thin volume entitled *De regia S. Laurentii Bibliothecá. De Pontificia Vaticana* [etc.].

Justus Lipsius wrote his *De Bibliothecis Syntagma* at the end of the sixteenth century, and next in importance we come to Gabriel Naudé, who published one of the most famous of bibliographical essays.

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The first edition was published at Paris in 1627, and the second edition in 1644. This was reprinted in Paris by J. Liseux in 1876—
“*Advis pour dresser une Bibliothèque, présenté à Monseigneur le President de Mesme, par G. Naudé P. Paris, chez François Farga, 1627.*”

This essay was translated by John Evelyn, and dedicated to Lord Chancellor Clarendon. “*Instructions concerning erecting of a Library; Presented to My Lord the President De Mesme. By Gabriel Naudéus P., and now interpreted by Jo. Evelyn, Esquire, London, 1661.*”

Naudé enlarges on the value of Catalogues, and recommends the book-buyer to make known his desires, so that others may help him in the search, or supply his wants. He specially mentions two modes of forming a library; one is to buy libraries entire, and the other is to hunt at book-stalls. He advised the book-buyer not to spend too much upon bindings.

Naudé appears to have been a born librarian, for at the early age of twenty