

## DISCUSSION AND CORRESPONDENCE.

## AN AUTOMATIC CATALOGUE OF SCIENTIFIC LITERATURE.

TO THE EDITOR OF SCIENCE: The cataloguing of current scientific literature is receiving considerable attention at the present time. The difficulty of accomplishing this with promptness and completeness is well shown in the first annual issue of the 'International Catalogue of Scientific Literature' comprehensively reviewed by Professor H. B. Ward, in a recent number of SCIENCE.

The spectacle of four organizations employed in practically the same work, viz., the cataloguing of zoological literature, and all the catalogues found to be incomplete when carefully scrutinized in any particular line, would seem to demonstrate the futility of hopes for a complete catalogue in a system where the cataloguers are compelled to collect and review the literature.

For a catalogue of scientific literature to be of great value it should enable a writer to feel that justice has been done his predecessors when the literature catalogued under any subject in question has been canvassed, and this will not be the case if there is even a doubt as to completeness. On the other hand, a catalogue, in which confidence was justified, would save an enormous amount of labor and greatly increase the efficiency of the world's investigators.

The character of the publications in which the results of scientific work appear are so diverse and difficult of access, and the amount of literature to be catalogued is really so large that any approach to absolute completeness by the means now employed seems out of the question, even with the most liberally endowed organization.

It seems clear to the writer, at least, that the desired result can be obtained only by some scheme in which the authors themselves are responsible for the cataloguing.

In scientific work the class that writes is, to a large extent, the same as that which consults the literature and it would seem only just that those wishing to use the work of others should be willing to make their own

work accessible. Scientific etiquette now demands that articles be published under reasonably short and appropriate titles, thus assisting the cataloguers in their enormous undertaking. May it not be possible to carry this a step further?

Let it be considered a necessary part of the publication of an article, that the title, at least, and an abstract, if desired, be submitted to the cataloguing organization. The labor of that body would then be confined to editorial work and could be accomplished by a comparatively small staff. The abstracts would convey the ideas of the authors and the interest which every writer takes in his own work would insure the completeness of the catalogue. It would be necessary to establish a maximum ratio between the length of the article and the length of the abstract. The general classification of the subjects would need to be made public and the authors should indicate under which branch they wish their work to be catalogued, it being allowable to catalogue a title under more than one subject-head with cross-references to the place where the abstract appears.

The title and abstract should be submitted simultaneously with the appearance of the publication; thus the catalogue could be complete to date of issue. This feature would also be entirely automatic, as it would be to every author's advantage to have his work placed before the public as promptly as possible.

Any scheme of this kind will appear to many as fanciful. Whether this charge be just or not depends entirely on the way in which the scheme is launched.

If simultaneously adopted by the large scientific organizations its automatic nature would insure its success. If put into operation prematurely by any organization that does not command the support of the scientific public its failure is no less certain. Indeed, an attempt of similar nature was made not long since by an obscure institution whose prospectus received little or no attention, other than that aroused by the fantastic English in which it was couched.

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