

SCIENCE

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MSS. intended for publication and books, etc., intended for review should be sent to the responsible editor, Professor J. McKeen Cattell, Garrison-on-Hudson N. Y.

THE INTERNATIONAL CATALOGUE.

AT the end of last month the Smithsonian Institution sent out a circular letter inviting various bodies in America to subscribe for a period of five years to the proposed International Catalogue of Scientific Literature. At an early stage of the deliberations concerning the Catalogue, it became evident that the necessary financial basis for the undertaking could not be secured on the plan of direct contributions from the several countries interested in the matter. An adequate basis however presented itself in the form of guaranteed subscriptions for a certain period; and it was calculated that a guarantee of subscriptions of about 300 complete sets would justify the work being begun. The German government undertook to subscribe for 45 complete sets for five years; other governments undertook subscriptions of lesser amounts; the Royal Society guaranteed that 45 copies should be subscribed for in Great Britain and Ireland; and, at the close of the International Conference, in June last, the financial prospects were found to be such that if subscriptions for 45 complete sets for five years, in the United States of America, could be assured, the work might at once be put in hand. The Smithsonian Institution undertook the task of asking for subscriptions; hence the circular in question.

Visiting Washington on Tuesday, last, I had the extremegratification of learning that

more than 45 complete sets (or the equivalent) had been already subscribed. The Catalogue, therefore, will be begun at once. Considering that the appeal of the Smithsonian Institution was made under most unfavorable conditions, namely in the middle of the vacation, I cannot but regard the result as a most encouraging proof that America is determined to give its characteristic support to what I think I may venture to call a most important international scientific undertaking. And I can myself all the more fully appreciate the value of this support because I am well aware that several features of the scheme for the conduct of the Catalogue have been severely criticised in this country, in which above all other countries much thought and labor has been spent on the problems of indexing.

May I take the opportunity of expressing on the part of the Royal Society of London a grateful recognition of that support, and at the same time of making, on my own responsibility, a few remarks on the whole subject.

1. Two different plans of indexing scientific literature by international cooperation present themselves. One is that this or that country should undertake the indexing of this or that branch of science, taking in hand the whole literature of that branch, the several countries agreeing among themselves to cover in this way the whole field of science. Another plan is for each country to collect the data of its own literature in all branches of science and for the final collation and editing of all the literature to be conducted in some international central office. Each plan has its advantages and disadvantages. The International Conference adopted the second plan; but this has necessarily had the drawback that it could not provide at once and directly for attaching to its organization undertakings already existing upon the other

plan. An alliance of such organizations with its own could only be brought about, if at all, by prolonged and difficult negotiations, however desirable such an alliance might seem.

2. The Catalogue is intended for two classes: for the scientific investigator and for libraries. So far perhaps the chief attention has been directed to the needs of the scientific investigator, as was natural seeing that the most active workers in the undertaking have been men of science engaged in investigation. But I think I am justified in saying that the men of science in question are fully aware of the great importance of making the Catalogue of value to libraries as well as to individual workers in science, and trust that in time it may be made equally useful to both.

3. At the first Conference it was decided that the Catalogue should be in a 'card' form as well as in a book form; but it was subsequently decided to give up the 'card' form *for the present*. This decision was based simply on the complexity of organization and expense which the card issue would involve. It was thought wiser to begin at least with the simpler book issue alone; but it is hoped by some that should the simpler enterprise prove successful, and the machinery be found to be manageable, the issue of cards may at some future day be undertaken.

4. No part of the scheme has met with more severe criticism than the schedules of classifications. With regard to these I venture to say that few persons, save those behind the scenes, can know the amount of labor which has been spent upon them. In the course of my life I have met with various things fertile in disagreements; but for a real apple of discord, nothing that I know of comes near to a schedule of classification; and it is, I imagine, unnecessary to say that the schedules as adopted represent the results of compromises, compromises in

some cases at least come to with much misgiving.

It must be remembered that though some of the schedules in question have been tested (and corrected) by being actually applied to a considerable mass of literature, they will all be severely tested by the actual experience even of the first year.

Speaking now entirely for myself and giving only my own opinion, I cannot expect otherwise than that the experience of the first year (or possibly even a shorter experience) will compel the International Council to authorize changes in the schedules. This, if done, will have the disadvantage of making the second year's Catalogue not wholly homogeneous with the first year's; but this I venture to think will be more than balanced by the better character of the second year's issue. Similarly with the third and fourth years. When the fifth year is reached, the Catalogue if it is to answer the expectations which it has raised may be expected to have passed through at least its main metamorphoses and to have assumed its adult form. If at the end of the fifth year, the office will be able, and it is hoped it will be able, to issue not only the Catalogue for the fifth year, but also a combined catalogue of all the five years taken together, then if that five year Catalogue and the fifth year Catalogue are not fully worth, both to workers and to libraries, the money asked for them, the whole enterprise had better be abandoned. And I would venture to urge very earnestly that the worth of the Catalogue should not be judged by its first issues; they must necessarily be most imperfect; they can only present not the achievement but the promise of what is intended.

5. As a substitute for cards, it was suggested that a bimonthly issue might be adopted, or an issue on an accumulative plan; but the Conference decided in the first instance to be content with the simple

annual book issue. There seems, however, to be no reason why special arrangements should not be made by which a subscriber should receive the Catalogue printed on one side only of the paper. Scissors and paste would soon convert this into a card catalogue.

6. The subscriptions asked for by the Smithsonian Institution, namely for complete sets of the 17 volumes a year, for five years, represent part of the financial basis of the enterprise. The calculations made show that an annual sale of about 300 sets of 17 volumes representing 17 branches of science at an *average cost* per volume of £1, *i. e.*, £17 or \$85 for a complete set will put the whole undertaking on a sound financial basis. The price of each volume will of course not be the same, some volumes (*e. g.*, Zoology) will be much larger than others (*e. g.*, Mineralogy). The exact price of each volume cannot be determined until the size, *i. e.*, the number of entries in that volume, is approximately known. Hence at present subscriptions for individual volumes at a stated price cannot be invited. Ultimately of course not only each volume, but in certain cases at least, parts of a volume, *i. e.*, indices of subdivisions of a branch of science will be offered for sale. The prices and conditions of sale will be determined hereafter.

M. FOSTER.

GARRISON-ON-HUDSON, N. Y.,
September 21, 1900.

ADDRESS OF THE PRESIDENT OF THE BOTANICAL SECTION OF THE BRITISH ASSOCIATION.

THERE has been considerable difference of opinion as to whether the present year marks the close of the nineteenth or the beginning of the twentieth century. But whatever may be the right or the wrong of this vexed question, the fact that the year-date now begins with '19' instead of with '18' suggests the appropriateness of