Madras Library Association

Publication Series, 6

PROLEGOMENA to LIBRARY CLASSIFICATION

Madras Library Association

PUBLICATION SERIES

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Copies can be had at

- The Madras Library Association, Triplicane, Madras.
- Edward Goldston, Ltd.,
 Museum Street, London, W.C.1.

PROLEGOMENA to LIBRARY CLASSIFICATION

BY

S. R. RANGANATHAN, M.A., L.T., F.L.A.

Librarian, Madras University Library Secretary, Madras Library Association Vice-President, Indian Library Association



MADRAS
THE MADRAS LIBRARY ASSOCIATION
LONDON: EDWARD GOLDSTON, LTD,
1937

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PRINTED BY R. NARAYANASWAMI IYER
AT THE MADRAS LAW JOURNAL PRESS, MYLAPORE, MADRAS.

To Chiranjeevi T. R. Yogeswaran

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The thanks of the author are due to the following persons and institutions:—

To the University of Madras, which gave the author generous facilities to make a special study of Library Science and Library Organisation in Great Britain, for permission to publish this book which is based on the experience gained during the last twelve years in organising the Madras University Library and teaching the subject to the students of the School of Library Science;

To the Madras Library Association for having taken up the publication of the book;

To Mr. L. Thompson for many valuable suggestions;

To Messrs. C. Sundaram, B.A., and K. M. Sivaraman, B.A., for the help given by them in the preparation of the manuscript;

To Mr. V. Jagannathan, B.A., for reading the proofs for the author; and

To the proprietor of the Madras Law Journal Press, for the efficient, expeditious and obliging way in which the printing has been carried out.

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PREFACE

BY

THE MADRAS LIBRARY ASSOCIATION

With the object of spreading the essential ideas of the Library Movement and of directing thought towards the creation of a library service suited to our country, the Madras Library Association inaugurated its Publication Series in 1929. The first volume. The Library movement, a collection of essays by Divers Hands, was widely circulated throughout the country. The second volume, The five laws of library science, by S. R. Ranganathan, which came out in 1931, sought to expound the principles of library organisation and management in a systematic form. The preface to that book contained the announcement "With the present volume on the Five laws of library science .. the Madras Library Association commences the publication of a series of books on the technical and practical aspects of library work."

In partial fulfilment of this announcement, the Association has already published the Colon classification in 1933, the Classified catalogue code in 1934 and the Library administration in 1935, all by S. R. Ranganathan. All these volumes have experienced a good circulation, both in India and abroad.

As another instalment of the Publication Series, the Association is publishing the present volume entitled *Prolegomena to library classifica*tion, the manuscript of which Mr. S. R. Ranganathan had been good enough to place at the disposal of the Association.

The Association hopes that this volume will get as widely circulated as its predecessors and enable the libraries in India and elsewhere to organise their work in an efficient, scientific and serviceable manner.

INTRODUCTION

It has been my experience—one doubtless shared by many others—that, when one is engaged on a problem, the most useful ideas occur suddenly, seeming at once to cast a flood of light over murky tracts of half-formed thought and promising reward to further exploitation. These inspirations, which present themselves as ready-made wholes, come, as we all know, at the oddest moments. They seldom come if they are sought, and they delight in choosing moments when pen and paper cannot be used to impede their flight. They come and whisper in our ears as we lie sleepily after dinner or as we mechanically repeat a long-drawn-out hymn as part of the daily routine of worship. To sit at the study table, with note-book and pencil, with the intention of meditating on one's problem invariably produces nothing but sleep.

It is a feature of these ideas that they always seem at first inspired, and we think them quite original—as in fact they are. But before long, and usually before our first notes have been developed, there comes awakening. Somebody else, we find, has thought of the same thing before, and has expressed it all in some well-known work. One's feelings at this discovery are mixed. First there is dismay at being deprived—nay robbed—of well-deserved priority. Then there is relief that one is spared the labour of cudgelling one's brains over the pioneer work involved, and further there is satis-

faction in the thought that if others, and cleverer men, have trodden this way before, then one is probably on the right path, and not wandering hopelessly in the wilderness.

Finally one is buoyed up by the hope that if one continues long enough in this way, one will in the end have climbed the crests of the known and be looking forward to undiscovered country. Would that it were possible that in this book the distant peaks should be visible through the wreaths of mist! One can hope for no more than this, and yet one is conscious of a thoroughly enjoyable journey, which has recalled again and again the sentiments expressed by R. L. Stevenson, "To travel hopefully is a better thing than to arrive".

This book is one result of twelve years' work at forging and polishing the Colon Classification and of nine years' work of teaching the principles of classification to mixed classes composed of some highly-disciplined minds and a few bewildered but willing ones that needed to be led step by step with explanations and illustrations even of the obvious. In teaching such classes, the exposition given in existing text-books were sometimes found inadequate.

It is now five years since the manuscript of the first edition of the Colon Classification was put into the hands of the printer. During this period, the scheme has been applied to 50,000 additional volumes of which 25,000 covered the wave-front of nascent thought on all the most important subjects. It afforded a good test. The test disclosed hidden potentialities in the scheme, which had not been consciously sensed at the time of invention.

It also disclosed some minor maladjustments which could have been avoided no doubt if I had been working on the basis of a well-tested theory of classification. But the process was reversed in my case. My theory had to be developed later to discover the cause of such maladjustments and to set them right. The first edition of the Colon classification being almost exhausted, I decided that it would be advantageous to work out the theory of classification before preparing the second.

Thus, it became a personal necessity and seemed not a useless labour to collect my thoughts which bore upon the theory of classification and record them in exact terms. These thoughts had been incubating in extra-conscious regions of the mind during the last twelve years in a way which seems to me exactly expressed in the following passage of John Drinkwater's Loyalties:—

Haunting the lucidities of life
That are my daily beauty, moves a theme
Beating along my undiscovered mind.

These were the general pre-disposing causes. But the book was actually precipitated last June in an attempt to expound to my class the full import of the principle of hospitality in reference to Book Classification. The experience in the class room had stirred the latent thought-mass at all levels. When I came home I found sleep impossible. Seeing my restlessness and probably disturbed by it, a relation who was sleeping in my room gave an innocent piece of advice. "Why don't you take up a book and read for a while?," he said, "That will bring you sleep". No doubt he was not aware of

Schopenhauer's observation "To put away one's own original thoughts in order to take up a book is to sin against the Holy Ghost". However, this suggestion recalled two books which I had set aside for later study, when at the first attempt I had found them unmanageable. They were the books of Bliss' on Classification.

My mind was by this time so saturated with the theory of classification that so far from these two books proving difficult and causing sleep, before midnight, in a single movement, I had forged through their entire range of 740 pages. My mind was pressed through these pages in so intimate and critical a way that my own book emerged clear cut as from a mould. All that remained was to fill in details and provide illustrations.

The First Part expounds the theory of classification. After the first seven pages, the first chapter, which seeks to build up the necessary scaffolding of terminology, may prove to be stiff reading for beginners. But they may skip over that portion in the first reading and refer to it whenever need is felt for definition of technical terms.

The second and third chapters develop the canons of classification that belong to the general theory. It is believed that these two chapters carry the analysis further than existing books on the subject. The treatment of Terminology and Notation may be found to be new.

The fourth chapter which deals with the special theory of Knowledge Classification, shows the ad-

² Bliss (Henry Evelyn): Organisation of knowledge, 1929, Organisation of knowledge in libraries, 1934.

It also disclosed some minor maladjustments which could have been avoided no doubt if I had been working on the basis of a well-tested theory of classification. But the process was reversed in my case. My theory had to be developed later to discover the cause of such maladjustments and to set them right. The first edition of the Colon classification being almost exhausted, I decided that it would be advantageous to work out the theory of classification before preparing the second.

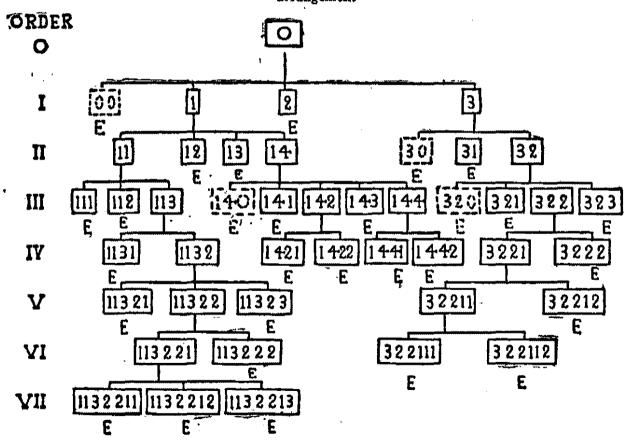
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PART I THEORY

Diagram showing Original Universe, Classes, Arrays, Collateral classes, Chains, Subordinate classes, Pseudo-classes, Order of classes and arrays, Division, Assortment and Filiatory arrangement



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