

Review Articles

The Sixteenth Dewey

Dewey Decimal Classification and Relative Index. Sixteenth Edition. Devised by Melvil Dewey. Edited by Benjamin A. Custer. 2 vols. Lake Placid Club, N. Y.: Forest Press, 1958. 2,439p. \$30.

In the preparation of the sixteenth edition, the Editorial Policy Committee was guided by the consideration that the new DC would be used by general libraries of widely varying sizes and that it should be constructed in such a way that it would be as useful for classifying large collections as for smaller ones. In determining the degree of expansion of the schedules, the editors used as their criterion the amount of published material on any given subject; if more than twenty titles were assignable to one number, they decided that subdivision of that number was warranted. This pragmatic approach helps considerably to rescue the sixteenth DC from the procrustean treatment given the two preceding editions—the fourteenth having some of its tables stretched out to an immoderate length and the fifteenth suffering severe truncation of many of its schedules. For the purposes of this review, comparisons will be limited to the fourteenth edition since, practically, it is the direct ancestor of the sixteenth.

Of primary consideration is the question of structure. It is axiomatic that any classification of knowledge, no matter how carefully constructed, will inevitably get out-of-date; and the more minute the classification the sooner it becomes obsolete. It is equally true that extensive relocation of subjects, in line with current concepts and new fields of learning, would not only be impractical and expensive to carry out, but would provide at best only a temporary solution. From the beginning, classifiers have recognized the basic conflict between the principles of keeping pace with knowledge and maintaining the integrity of numbers. In dealing with this vexing problem of structure, the editors

have employed three approaches: (1) expansion, (2) curtailment, and (3) relocation.

The expansion of the tables in the sixteenth DC takes two forms. First, one observes how many of the tables have been worked out fully, thereby reducing to a minimum the number of "divide like" instructions; for example, the numbers from 440 to 489 occupied less than one page in the fourteenth Dewey. Nine major and at least a score of minor languages had but the one linear instruction to divide like 420 English. In the sixteenth edition these language tables, filling five pages, are set out individually, at least in their main subdivisions, and although the necessity to follow the English pattern still exists, it is on a more specific basis and directions are repeated wherever they apply; e.g. under 455 Italian Grammar is printed "Divide like 425." An even more dramatic example can be found in 560 Paleontology. In the fourteenth edition this entire class occupied ten lines listing the general heading and its nine principal divisions. The classifier was dispatched in three directions—to Geology for the form divisions, to Botany for fossil plants, and to Zoology for the rest, to say nothing of a rather cumbersome note on geographic subdivision. In the sixteenth DC, Paleontology requires eleven pages.

The sixteenth DC also contains true expansion in its subdivisions of numbers to provide places for new topics. As one would expect, these occur primarily in the scientific and technical fields, such as Nuclear Physics with thirty-four places instead of one, or Nuclear Engineering with nine places where none at all existed in the fourteenth edition. It is beyond the scope of this review to attempt a comprehensive listing of every change in the sixteenth DC and therefore only representative examples are given.

In their efforts to redress the structural balance, the editors, in addition to expanding certain tables, have employed the opposite device of contracting or curtailing schedules that had grown out of all proportion to the rest of the classification and even

to the material on the shelves. An obvious example of pure elimination of places occurs on the literature tables. For instance, in 822 English Drama only the eleven period divisions are printed and no attempt is made to list the names and dates of the principal dramatists within each period. A further simplification is carried out in the other divisions of English Literature, Poetry, Fiction, Essays, etc., where no breakdown is given at all and the classifier is instructed to "Divide like 822." This creates no confusion, since the time divisions are virtually identical for all literary forms of any national literature. By employing this same device throughout the schedules of the major literatures, the 800 class is reduced from forty-eight to eighteen and one-half pages with no intrinsic loss of comprehensiveness.

In this connection, one finds curtailment of schedules where one might least expect it, namely in the technical and scientific subjects. A statistical count made of just one aspect of Engineering—621.384 Radio Communication—shows that in the fourteenth edition 321 places were provided, the numbers often running to eight or nine decimal places, whereas the sixteenth edition gives twenty-six places with the majority of the numbers of five decimal places or less. Upon examining the topics covered, it seems evident that the abbreviated schedule provides sufficient places for even the large general library's collection of material on radio communication engineering. As the editor points out in his introduction, an alphabetical arrangement of minor subtopics may be adopted if a large amount of specialized material exists in a given collection.

The two types of structural adjustment discussed above, expansion and contraction, have effected a more evenly balanced set of tables in the new DC. The third type, relocation of topics, is an attempt to achieve better balance from the intellectual point of view, that is, to reassign certain subjects in conformity with the current approach to the various disciplines. The whole question of relocation is fraught with controversy and every librarian will have to make his own decision regarding the extent to which he wishes to reclassify his collection.

In the sixteenth DC 1,603 relocations have been recommended, of which 832 are total

and 771 partial. In all, however, only about fifty of them would involve reclassifying more than thirty titles in a large general collection. The editors felt that these so-called major relocations were unavoidable, the previous numbers having become absurd in terms of the present grouping of subjects. Every relocated topic is clearly distinguished by a conventional symbol, both in its new position in the schedule and in its former place. Furthermore, the same symbols are used in the index so that it is clear at a glance which numbers are no longer used or are used for a different purpose. A certain amount of tidying up has been done in Psychology, although it is still a hopelessly scattered field. Here, the editors lost a chance to make substantial changes which are inevitable.

In one subject area the editors devised entirely new schedules. Present day concepts in organic and inorganic chemistry are so radically different from what they were when the scheme was built that new schedules were necessary. Since it is unrealistic to expect that librarians will be able to reclassify these sections of their chemistry collections promptly, the older tables, brought up-to-date as much as possible, have been printed following the index and labelled "obsolescent." By the time the seventeenth edition is published, they will be considered obsolete and will not be reprinted.

In addition to relocation, the editors have taken into account the fact that some libraries, by reason of their collections or clientele, have specialized needs that do not fit the standard pattern. For these, alternative positions have been indicated in certain subject fields which, while not recommended generally, are sanctioned by the Editorial Policy Committee.

An invaluable adjunct in redressing the structural imbalance is the judicious use of typography and indentation. With the ever expanding fields of knowledge, true decimalization has often been lost and topics of equal weight subordinated one to the other or, the reverse, coordinate numbers assigned to subordinate topics. A good example of how this situation is corrected, at least visually, can be found in the geographic divisions of France, 944.1 - .9. *Île-de-France* .34 is given parallel weight and posi-

tion with Champagne .3, whereas Paris metropolitan area .36, by its indentation and lighter type, is clearly a subdivision of the Ile-de-France. At the same time, the columnar arrangement of the geographical units makes the tables easier to use than the cramped paragraph arrangement of the fourteenth edition. In fact, the type has been reset throughout and the excessive differences of size, weight, and style of type faces have been eliminated.

In addition to typography, the terminology has been gone over thoroughly and brought up to date. Not only has the spelling been returned almost to normal, but innumerable outdated words and phrases have been replaced by current nomenclature. For example, changes have been made in the headings of the major classes: "Language" replaces "Filology," "Technology" is in place of "Useful arts Applied science," and "The Arts" for "Fine arts Recreation." Throughout the schedules the editors have shown sound judgment in selecting terms that are in general use. More important is the addition of extensive annotations. These include definitions and scope notes, inclusion notes, instruction notes, and cross references.

For a related series of numbers, centered headings have been introduced, with notes covering the whole sequence, which serve as a substitute for a comprehensive heading and obviate the need to repeat the notes under each individual number. Space prevents a more detailed discussion of the annotations here but the editor, in his introduction, does an excellent job of exposition.

Because the major portion of these annotations is entirely new, and because the new typographical arrangement is so generous with space, the sixteenth DC shows an overall increase of 512 pages, despite the fact that the actual number of entries is cut by 13,436, or almost half of those in the fourteenth DC. As a result, the work has been divided into two volumes; any inconvenience incurred by this separation is of minor importance when compared with the incalculable improvements of the new format. Some may even prefer to work with two separate volumes.

The second volume consists primarily of the Relative Index, which has approximately the same number of entries as the index to the fourteenth edition but, like their corre-

sponding tables, the entries have been thoroughly revised and reworded. The material following the index, however, is quite different from the fourteenth DC. Particularly noteworthy is the reprinting of the special author table for Shakespeare (one wonders why it was omitted previously) and the elimination of both the Table for Systematic Botany (now printed in very abridged form in the Botany schedule) and the Supplementary Tables. The Table of Form Divisions, salvaged and sensibly expanded, has been placed immediately preceding the classification tables, a far more convenient position. Less understandable is the retention of the list of topics which may be divided geographically. Since instructions on division are given in the tables themselves for each of the 322 places, their listing in straight numerical order in the second volume would seem to be of limited value.

In conclusion, one can say that the sixteenth DC shows a tremendous improvement in terms both of structural balance and of facility to the user. Although there is no complete solution to the basic conflict between advancing knowledge and a predetermined scheme of classification, the editors have effected a compromise that probably will be welcomed in libraries committed to the Dewey Decimal Classification. Libraries which have found DC unsatisfactory in its basic principles have shifted to other systems.—*Alison Smith, Metropolitan Museum of Art Library, New York.*

Studies in Germanics

Germanistische Studien. By Arno Schirokauer. Selections and introduction by Fritz Strich. Hamburg: Ernst Hauswedell & Co., 1957. 451p.

From Arno Schirokauer's numerous studies in Germanics this valuable volume contains twelve which he published between 1924, four years after his first, and 1954, the year of his death. In its chronological arrangement the selection is representative not only of Schirokauer's course of development, but of the scope and dimensions of his scholarship. The first reprinted here is his early