Review Articles

Subject Classifying and Indexing

Subject Classifying and Indexing of Libraries and Literature. By John Metcalfe. New York: Scarecrow Press, 1959. 347p. $7.50.

Again John Metcalfe has woven an intricate web, constructed of theory and practice, past and present, pro and con, simple definitions and clear statements of purpose, shrewd guesses and carefully worked out examples. This book is intended as a textbook for English and Australian librarians facing an official examination, and differs in many ways from his earlier volume.[1] Mr. Metcalfe is an Australian librarian of twenty years' experience and is at present starting a school of librarianship at the University of New South Wales, where he is librarian.

The book will also interest non-librarians because of the comparative nature of its presentation. Choices are marshalled and made among classification systems and indexing methods. The boundaries between information retrieval and library work are charted and outposts held in common noted.

Metcalfe is a librarian with a definite position that he strongly defends. He prefers subject headings to classification for cataloging or indexing purposes, and so he champions the dictionary, or alphabetico-specific entry, type of catalog instead of the classed catalog. His reasons for this position are forcibly stated more than once in the book. "Our language is not classificatory in any systematic way, and it is affected by accidents." (p. 9.) "And above all it should be remembered that catalogues are to be judged by ease and efficiency in consultation, not by ease and economy in compilation." (p. 163.) "Note that it is easy to go outside a subject heading list or to add to one, in fitting a subject in the system to a book's subject, because the only limit is that of lan-

[1] *Information Indexing and Subject Cataloging: Alphabetical; Classified; Coordinate; Mechanical* (New York: Scarecrow Press, 1957).

guage at large. It is not as easy to go outside a classification, which is a fixed and limited language or code which can never be sufficiently flexible or synthetic." (p. 216.) At all times, Metcalfe is on the side of necessary practice.

Now that documentalists and engineers are involved in the attack on the problems of storage and retrieval of information, it should behoove them to find out how their scholarly predecessors did. So many of the battles being joined have already been fought to workable compromises by librarians, i.e., whether titles provide a sufficient basis for subject indexing of contents, how classification is needed in alphabetic systems, how alphabetic arrangement is needed in classifications, the competence of subject specialists versus trained indexers or catalogers, the physical differences between books on shelves and cards in drawers, the limits and excesses of meaningful codes, etc. None of the answers needs to be taken as final, and Metcalf is not ready to do so. But he notes that the same mistakes should not have to be repeated by each new generation.

A shrewd insight is casually thrown in. "The economic possibilities of mechanical selection are in compilation rather than in consultation. . . ." (p. 208.) Most searching machines could also provide data for cumulative indexes and those having special viewpoints, as well as data for analyses of the literature of a field or the holdings of a particular collection. The indexes and analyses could be distributed as appropriate to customers before they have reached the point where they have to ask questions. Such additional and regular services would make the cost of searching machines economic for the first time in many places.

Metcalfe quotes with glee Pope's 1728 dictum on "index learning" as that which

". . . turns no student pale,
Yet holds the eel of science by the tail."

(p. 31.) Library students only wish it were so. Metcalfe does not tread easily nor softly for the benefit of his students. In fact, he continually upbraids and urges them onward to examine more and more intricate prob-

lems. Metcalfe belongs to the virile genera-
tion of Teddy Roosevelt which consumed
hard work with as much relish as many peo-
ple now consume vitamin pills.

There are sixty exercises in the back of
the book (pp. 301-17), and then the answers
(pp. 318-39). Copies of Cutter's *Rules* and
Dewey's *Decimal Classification* are essential
for many of the exercises. Finally, Metcalfe
provides a "rather miscellaneous" set of rules
for classifying (pp. 225-30) and a set of rules
for alphabetico-specific entry (pp. 263-96).
The significance of these rules may be
missed by non-librarians as they are ex-
pressed in bibliographical and grammatical
terms. They represent the crystallized experi-
ence of one set of catalogers, and may be
called the "programming" rules for human
machines.—*Mrs. Lea M. Bohnert, Data Re-
search Specialist, RCA Service Co., Alexan-
dria, Va.*

Goliath and the Council

*Third Annual Report for the Period Ending
June 30, 1959,* Council on Library Re-
sources, Inc. Washington, D. C.: The
Council, 1959, 62p.

This third annual report of the Council
on Library Resources shows it at almost the
halfway stage in its five-year life span, but
with considerably less than one-half of its
five million dollars committed. Projects ap-
proved range from support of the third edi-
tion of the *Union List of Serials* to experi-
mental publication of a scientific journal in
microfilm, from a photostorage and retrieval
system for libraries to support of a national
union catalog of manuscript materials, from
deterioration of book stock to international
coordination of cataloging rules. Obviously
the Council is moving conservatively, but on
a wide front, in carrying out its charge "of
aiding in the solution of the problems of
libraries generally and of research libraries
particularly . . . and disseminating through
any means the results thereof."

When the Council was established in 1956
I commented elsewhere on this notable and
exciting event, under the title "The Biblio-
graphic Goliath and a New David." Every-
thing that has happened and is happening

in the bibliothecal world in this present cen-
tury, including the three reports of the
Council, emphasizes that it is indeed Goliath
that the Council confronts and against
which, David-like, it marshalls and directs its
small arsenal of Ford dollars. It is a Goliath,
moreover, which grows bigger and more
formidable before its very eyes, and before
the eyes of all of us who labor to confine,
to organize, to make usable the graphic and
auditory records of a highly articulate civi-
lization.

"Deluge," "inundation," "flood," "quag-
mire," "avalanche," these were words the
Council, in its first report, singled out as
descriptive of the tremendous and rapidly
growing mass of the world's literature. All
of these are terms fully justified by the phe-
nomenon of man's productivity as a book-
writing, book-using, and book-storing crea-
ture. All of them help to point up the mag-
nitude of the problems of the Council and
of all who work at keeping abreast of the
"explosive" rate of book increase. This rate,
says the report, has been doubling every
forty-five years since Gutenberg, and in the
United States it has, within the past 150
years, been doubling every twenty-two years.

The Council, in carrying out its charge,
seeks to maintain an over-all view. "A bal-
ance must be struck," says President Verner
Clapp in his introduction, "between present-
day problems and planning the ideal 'library
of the future.'" The report shows that to
some extent this has been done. The weight,
however, is clearly and, this reviewer be-
lieves, wisely on the side of present needs
and problems of libraries as they struggle
against the "avalanche." So great is this ava-
lanche, that the modest grants discussed and
those detailed in tabular form seem little
more than pebbles, with a fair sized stone or
two mixed in, directed against Goliath.
There must always be the hope however that
some one of these, or all of them combined,
plus of course non-Council-sponsored ef-
forts, may find some truly vital or significant
spot which, if not conquering the monster
of massiveness, will at least keep it submis-
sively in the service of mankind.

The Council, the report shows, weighs
every project and proposal placed before it
from the standpoint of the part it may have
in helping librarianship with its task of col-
lecting recorded information and making it