SOME TRIBULATIONS OF A BIBLIOGRAPHER(1)

I feel that I owe you an apology - and myself an apologia. This subject was suggested to me, whether facetiously or not I hope that I shall never know. The opportunity for a jeremiad was irresistible.

Bibliography is doubtless regarded as a lowly craft, like dictionary making, but it is nevertheless part of the art of communication and that is surely one of the most important elements in the progress of man. From the spoken word it was a natural step to record and to transmit ideas and information and then to record the records. At least 4,000 years ago, in ancient Babylonia, when people were jotting down their memos on clay, a list of books was inscribed on tablets. Library administrators believe that the cataloguing process has accelerated very little since.

From this you will infer that I have adopted the most pedestrian definition of bibliography, a list of books, and will not dabble in dark mysteries like the transmission of texts hinted at in the American Library Association glossary. It could also be assumed that the list of books principally in mind is the Canadian national bibliography.

The tribulations, both given and received, stem from failures in this very art of communication, from lack of comprehension, and, in addition, from uncertainty of purpose and of technique, from want of recognition and most certainly from dearth of bibliographers. This is poor classification. The categories overlap and interact, but even that is characteristic of the times. It is the relationship between subjects which most bedevil classifiers these days.

Difficulties in communication are not, of course, peculiar to our calling. Our particular problems arise chiefly, I think, from the general resistance to reading. For example: The law requires that two copies of every book manufactured in Canada, or bearing a Canadian Imprint on the title page, be deposited in the National Library. When these arrive we send back a receipt in the form of a card. The word "Receipt" is printed at the top of the card and we now underline it in red. The recipient of the receipt has only to file it or, if he prefers, to throw it in the waste basket. Nevertheless the effect of the receipt is frequently to elicit two more copies of the book.

(1) Text of Dr. Lunn's address to the members of the Society at the Annual Meeting held in Ottawa on June 28, 1932.
which have to be returned with an explanatory note. The more cautious may return the receipt with a query as to whether it is a receipt or a request for publications. One can only reply politely, "This is a receipt, period." What recommendations a Royal Commission on Paperwork might have for this kind of correspondence, I hesitate to think. The law specifies the deposit of two copies. We receive one. Another letter and another delay. The regulations make it quite clear that we have no intention of paying for anything. The books arrive with invoices enclosed. More paperwork. Then of course there are the unwary who send us advertisements, not knowing that we welcome little fishes in, with gently smiling jaws. We ask for volume 1, no. 1, of new periodicals. We frequently receive a later issue which the publisher thinks is better for us. We explain largely that we do not wish to be put on the mailing list. Just try to turn off that tap. Separatism also gives us pause. It takes time and typing to recover books, meant for the National Library, which are deposited instead in the Legislative Library of Ontario. And what are we to make of parcels from British Columbia bearing customs declarations? I mean, where do we go from here? Our very jobs are at stake.

Each month we send marked, complimentary copies of Canadiana to authors whose work is listed. We have long since learned to accept the fact that this monthly issue is usually assumed by the recipient to be the list of Canadian publications for the year. If we cannot locate the author we may use a forwarding address and enclose a form asking the author for his address for future reference. Recently one issue sent to an American publisher for forwarding was opened by the publisher and the form returned filled out with the publisher's address, which we must obviously have had in the first place. I can imagine that the envelope was opened by error, the cover lost and the contents dropped on some puzzled employee who said to himself, "Those people up in Canada are peculiar but I had better humour them." We gave up on that one.

Then there is the notorious case of the missing number for August 1956. We publish a combined issue for July-August. Because the printer did not read the requisition, the cover of this summer issue in 1956 bore the designation "no. 7, July", instead of "no. 7-8, July-August". Inside, the first page and the running heads were correctly dated. Because Canadiana is reproduced photographically, we do not proofread after printing, so the issue was distributed. As soon as we saw a copy we realized what was going to happen, so we prepared an explanation which was to appear on the outside of the front cover of the next issue. The printer placed the note on the first inside page. We
are still getting requests for the August 1956 issue. People seem to like to have *Canadana* around but I doubt that they ever open it.

Endlessly we receive orders for subscriptions, and claims for missing issues, all of which should go directly to the Queen's Printer. Many are obsessed with the idea that we are the Library of Parliament. And we are never going to live down the Canadian Bibliographic Centre. We sometimes get cold notes instructing us that all mail should be addressed to The Chief Librarian, such-and-such library. These are addressed to the Bibliographic Centre and should have gone to the Queen's Printer anyway.

A note in the January 1961 issue announces that, beginning with the 1956 volume, annual cumulations are free only to depository libraries. This has been thoroughly missed. Now there is another situation coming up. At the beginning of this year three cumulations were awaiting publication, namely 1959, 1960 and 1961. Rightly or wrongly we were persuaded that the last, 1961, was the one most needed. Accordingly we have sent 1961 to press first, to be followed, we hope this year, by 1959 and by 1960. All this is explained in the foreword to the 1961 volume. We are braced for the storm that will break as soon as 1961 hits the newsstands. We shall be pelted with postcards demanding 1959 and 1960. The search for the Venus de Milo's arms will have nothing on it. Clearly we need some Madison Avenue boys on our establishment - that's governmentese for staff.

To failures in communication, may be added uncertainty of purpose. There does not seem to be a precise definition of national bibliography or generally accepted agreement as to its purposes. This vagueness affects both content and presentation. Probably national bibliography is usually thought of as the printed literary production of a country, and generally countries with a sizeable literary output are willing to stop there. Not so the country cousins (sometimes called sister dominions). At least nothing so unambitious satisfies Canada, which takes everything even remotely Canadian to be its province, not excluding Newfoundland. It is inconceivable that the U.K. or the U.S.A. for example would undertake to track down every last word published by its nationals or about its nation. If it is wrong for the big ones, is it right for the small ones? Perhaps so. It seems equally inconceivable that we should allow any of our native sons to escape us just because they happen to get to publish in Paris or London or New York. Perhaps, too, we self-conscious arrivistes are more interested in what the neighbours say about us. Here, however, is where the tribulations begin. After twelve years we still
debate the question, "What is a Canadian?". We know that some of our claims give rise to merriment and they even look pretty silly to ourselves sometimes. Suppose an author was born in Saskatchewan and promptly left for even greener fields, what is that to us? Suppose J. K. Galbraith was not only born north of 49 but even remained for his schooling; he is not now wearing his maple leaf stickpin in India. But no sooner do we decide to abandon our Canadians irredeemable than they turn up in the "Canadian who's who" or some such place. So at some cost in absurdity we retreat within the safe limits of the letter of the law. The claims system works in only one direction of course, like a fish hook. Stephen Leacock was born in England and did not escape until the age of six, but let no one try to wrest him from us.

Then there is the category "Canadian in subject". Where does one draw the line? We have decided that such material should be "substantially" Canadian in subject. I defy anyone from Samuel to Noah to Sir James Augustus Henry Murray precisely to define "substantially".

Even upon the native heath we are not safe. Should we list everything published in Canada? Does anyone really want all of the paperbacks all of the time? We don't know. Perhaps some budding sociologist or statistician or censor does. Besides, taxpayers read them. So we compromise by herding some of the fiction at least into a corner of Canadiana labelled "Pocket books Canadian in manufacture only".

It is not our business to discriminate. Nevertheless, in an effort to clear out some of the clutter, we are now trying to omit trivia and ephemera, periodicals of very limited or local interest such as parish magazines, home and school bulletins, club papers, some employee magazines, together with all routine or administrative annual reports, other than government. So we are departing from the letter and, not only is there danger of throwing out the baby with the bathwater, but we are constantly involved in making arbitrary decisions based on nebulous premises. Small wonder that some of them are as cloudy as my metaphors. We sympathize with the New Brunswick potato sorter who quit his job because it was nothing but decisions, decisions, decisions all day long.

Linked to the problem of what constitutes a national bibliography is the question of for whom it is intended. In our environment it is easy to assume that it is meant only for librarians but should it not also serve students, scholars, book dealers, subject bibliographers, anyone who wants a list of Canadian books? Should it be only for home consumption or should it
take international use into account? Supposing, or admitting, that it is primarily for Canadian libraries, what type of library should it serve? And what department in the library?

Many vague but menacing masters loom over us and we, unwisely, try to serve them all. We arrange entries by subject, at least in a primitive kind of way, for the benefit of the reference librarian and of the subject bibliographer, and deny the cataloguer, usually interested in a specific item, the ease of finding an entry in a straight alphabetical author list. We obey the canons of cataloguing and avoid critical notes, thereby disappointing the book selector. We clutter up entries with prices and sources for the benefit of the order librarian, but in the interests of our publishers give only Canadian prices and sources where possible. We catalogue some books in English, some in French, some in both languages so that we fail to satisfy some of our people all of the time and doubtless baffle all of our foreign consumers most of the time. We probably catalogue too fully for small libraries, too unconventionally for large ones.

The tribulation part, or rather our part of the tribulation, is pressure from particular groups to stop doing whatever we are doing and begin doing exactly what each group wants. We are all naturally myopic, in fact blind as pit ponies, about our own specialties. Compromise is supposed to be an old Canadian custom. Freely translated, compromise means that you can't win. Attempts to practise it impart an interesting, if unnerving, sensation of balancing on the point of a pin, but we doubt that we are in the company of the angels.

We try to justify some of our strange effects by maintaining that Canadiana is a priced, classed bibliography, not a library catalogue, but there is no use pretending that it is not put together in the weird light of the red and green beacons. I mean the A.L.A. rules for entry and the Library of Congress rules for description. So we share the sorrows of cataloguers. The A.L.A. code is accused of a surfeit of rules and a lack of principles. Obviously any attempt to provide a specific rule for every case is foredoomed to failure. It is clearly impossible to anticipate every vagary of author or publisher. Current strictures of the code may, however, be too harsh. It is a mistake to assume that all one's predecessors are crazy. Certainly since 1949 millions of entries by that code have not only been put into thousands of catalogues, but they have also even been found again. Nevertheless it is true that often enough the code leaves one in the ditch, like the centipede, considering how to run. It includes a
number of permissive rules, so that you don't know which way to jump and, to judge by any union catalogue, people jump in all directions, including right now jumping on the code itself. On the other hand, lack of clear statements of principle leads people to adhere to the letter which leads to such extremes as entering the Dumbarton Oaks conference of 1944 under "Washington, D.C. Conversations on International Organization", or putting the Gouchiching conference under the Canadian Institute on Public Affairs. This may be foolish, but it at least has the virtue of being consistently foolish. There is something to be said for this. One of the most inane criticisms of cataloguing made by uninformed critics is that an entry is wrong because that is not the way people look it up. By what divine revelation they imagine that they know how everybody looks everything up, I do not know. To me it seems elementary that given rules for putting things away, at least the people who know the rules will find them again. Operate arbitrarily and you won't even find them again yourself. If it is safe to generalize at all, I would say that in many cases people approaching a catalogue are equipped with a half-remembered title and a completely forgotten author. Nevertheless entry under author makes sense. That principle, entry under author, was established by the Greeks, a notoriously rational people. A catalogue is necessarily a complicated bibliographical tool, not a billboard for the information of the passerby at 60 miles an hour plus. Even the manipulation of a slide rule, a relatively simple device, is not immediately obvious to the novice.

So, for the most part, we trudge along with the orthodox, somewhat reluctantly entering Queen's under Kingston, Western under London, Ont., and the Royal Ontario Museum under Toronto. Occasionally we balk and rationalize, putting National Library and National Gallery under Canada, not Ottawa. This pains those who have remained within the fold and they share their sufferings with us. Reaction to this small gesture of independence was trivial compared with the outcry from the faithful when we appeared to offend against the government entry hierarchy by omitting subdivisions intervening between the largest and the smallest units of subordination. It seemed certain that we would suffer the traditional fate of heretics and other deviationists when, I think, Mr. Lubetzky saved us. Just in time the idea found a niche in at least the draft of the revised code.

Doubtless everybody here knows that the A.L.A. rules for entry are now being revised by Mr. Seymour Lubetzky, who is striving to discern and to formulate principles, to clarify and to codify. Some radical changes are proposed and the new code, although still
In the draft stage, had a large influence on the outcome of the International Conference on Cataloguing Principles held in Paris last October (1961). That Conference adopted such principles as entering institutions under their own names instead of under place, entering corporations which change their names and periodicals which change their titles under successive names or titles, not all together under the latest form, entering authors under the form of their names most commonly appearing in their works, but not necessarily the real or complete names.

All these changes and rumours of changes leave us in exactly the same position as other cataloguers - in doubt. An excuse for postponing a decision can be found, if one wishes, in waiting to see what the National Library will do. The National Library can examine its own conscience and/or wait for the bigger fleas to jump. At the moment it seems premature to adopt the proposed changes. The American code is not yet finished and may undergo further modifications. As for the International code, official delegates and national committees were enjoined to take the necessary action to ensure that the rules are put into practice in their own countries as soon as possible. The key word is "possible". It would be cynical, if not dangerously incriminating, to question whether all official delegations and those who sent them feel bound by the resolutions adopted. It is at least possible that when people got home from Paris, and sobered up, they would recall that no resolutions called for the magical provision of means, that is, time, money and staff. At the Conference when Library of Congress from the floor blandly inquired of British Museum in the chair what plans the British Museum had for making the necessary changes, it elicited the reply "That puts the baby squarely on our doorstep, doesn't it?". So the next move is anybody's guess.

Meanwhile, in telling over our tale of woe, let us not forget the green twin, the L.C. rules for descriptive cataloguing. If the red rules for entry are too discursive, the green rules for description are a very miracle of compression. They are condensed to the point of ambiguity, incomprehension and indigestion. If in the A.L.A. rules for entry you can't see the forest for the trees, in the L.C. rules for description the forest is so dense that scarcely a tree is in sight. It is fatally easy to misinterpret the rules, to make false assumptions. Unwrapping the implications is analogous to the Chinese boxes or perhaps to the all day sucker. Every time you take another lick at the rules you get a little more food for thought. Indeed our desk copies look licked. The gold leaf of the spines has long since disappeared under the attrition of our perspiring hands.
Since, I repeat, *Canadiana* is not a library catalogue, the cataloguing rules do not carry us all the way. The lack of rules specifically for bibliography leaves us free to devise strange entries for bilingual publications, for continuations, catalogued as monographs but in periodical form, for items in Cyrillic alphabets catalogued from added title pages. Inventing expedients ad hoc is rather fun. The pain that results is not ours.

I do not know if there is any generally accepted distinction between a bibliography and a catalogue. The public, perhaps with instinctive good sense, calls everything, indiscriminately, an index. From time to time the radio programme *Now I ask you* has a question about famous Deweys. James Bannerman always locks his lips and launches into a description of our Melvil's "index". Perhaps Mr. Bannerman is not so far off the beam, considering that decimal classification was first devised for use in a classified catalogue and not for shelving books.

Accepting the arbitrary definition of a bibliography as a list of books and a catalogue as a list of books in a collection, a library or a group of libraries, I contend that catalogues are the basis of bibliography. This assertion has been flatly contradicted. I have been told that a man begins a bibliography by consulting his wife, not by consulting a library catalogue. If this is true, I would assume that the next day his wife, being a sensible woman, puts on her hat and goes around to the local library. I cannot think of a better place in which to compile a bibliography.

To describe a book someone must handle it. A conscientious bibliographer does this for himself as far as possible, but sooner or later he is defeated by time or space and must depend on descriptions at second hand. In effect he catalogues or uses catalogues. Let us hark back to the cataloguing rules. Some current tendencies bode no good for the bibliographer. Catalogues have two purposes, one, to locate a specific item, and two, to bring like material together. Sometimes these functions are irreconcilable and one has to be sacrificed to the other. There seems now to be some movement towards favouring the finding list over the assembling function and it is the latter which particularly serves the bibliographer. Moreover, for legitimate reasons no doubt, description is becoming less detailed. This simplifies something for somebody, principally for the treasurer, but not for the bibliographer. For instance, meddle with the imprint long enough and you won't know what you have. The argument that it really does not matter how much you abbreviate in the catalogue because you can always get the book
from the shelves and look at it, is, of course, specious. In the first place the reason for the catalogue is to reduce the physical volume of the books to manageable proportions. Secondly, the book in your hand does not necessarily reveal its relationships. Thirdly, the book you want may not be there because somebody else has it. Fourthly, the book may be thousands of miles away if you are using a union catalogue or the printed catalogue of another library.

To deficiencies of practice, may be added the deficiencies of the practitioners. We are all guilty of inaccuracy, confusion and inadequacy. If it is any satisfaction to those who suffer from our mistakes, I can assure them that there is a retributive justice. In our search for Canadiana items we are misled by entries that are just simply wrong, everything from names misspelled to entries like "Canada. Dept. of Municipal Affairs" (Imprint Toronto, Queen's Printer), and by those which omit essential information, series, for example, or notes such as "Reprinted from" or "Typewritten manuscript", and by original efforts which take the title from the book jacket and don't admit it. This can result in our sending for material that we already have or do not want.

With all their faults in theory and practice, cataloguing rules are far more highly developed and more generally accepted than are rules for bibliography, and although cataloguing codes will not satisfy all the requirements of bibliography it would be well if they were given greater recognition by some bibliographers. Writers about bibliography debate questions which cataloguers have already settled reasonably well. Bibliographers without the law fall into evil practices. The fruit of much good and honest industry may be at least tainted, if not spoiled, by incidental faults like obscure alphabeting, confusing indexes, catchword entries, upper cased authors or titles.

Bibliography is practised by no recognized profession. Even people who ought to know better seem to be unaware that there is anything to be known about the craft. We are suffering right now from an academic ignorance of the facts of bibliography. We are renewing our attempt to produce a current list of Canadian theses. These exist only in typescript so that copies are not available for examination and we must depend on lists sent to us by the universities. In spite of our urging that the information be prepared by the university libraries and in spite of the fact that you would expect university authorities, when they want bibliographical work done, to turn naturally to the department most concerned with books and bibliography, nevertheless in many cases the library is ignored. Lists consist of pages torn from convocation programmes
or are typed up in the Registrar's office or that of the Dean of Graduate Studies. Results are very odd. One rule of grammar has been learned only too well, namely that the principal words of titles are capitalized. This leads to ambiguity in our business because you then cannot always tell the general from the particular and all scientific terms have to be checked for correct capitalization. The lists are full of typographical errors so subtle that they can be recognized only by special knowledge. This leaves an editor wondering how many are not caught in subjects beyond his ken. Faith was really shaken when a cross check on some of these lists revealed that the titles given bore only a faint resemblance to the actual titles of the theses. A possible explanation is that the information sent to us was made up from topics submitted by applicants to the Graduate School before they had even begun their research. We supplied a list of subject headings and asked that they be assigned by cataloguers because the work required some understanding of Dewey. This was largely ignored and either subjects were not supplied at all or else they were assigned from the names of the university departments to which the theses were submitted. Our duty in this so-called co-operative enterprise is supposed to be to interfile and print the information received. In fact, no matter how much we disclaim responsibility, we shall be held responsible and, given even a vestige of integrity, it is impossible to publish something which you know, or strongly suspect, to be wrong. You can imagine how time consuming all this is and how nightmarish to think of what depths of error may still lie unrevealed.

Lack of recognition of the cataloguer's craft may stem partly from the fact that the work looks clerical in nature. In truth, a relatively high level of training and of intelligence is required to produce an apparently simple result. Nevertheless the idea seems to be entertained that anyone who can type can catalogue. Just tell the typists to invert the author's name and copy the title page where they will find everything that they need neatly set out for them, but we know that books are not like that. Truth is indeed stranger than fiction. To be sure Ethel M. Dell does not require the same loving and informed care as the Book of Kells. Here I cannot forebear to rush in unwisely with the awful disclosure that the best people enter the latter under "Bible. Manuscripts, Latin, N.T. Gospels. Book of Kells". In fact non-professionals can and do list simple fiction but reference and research libraries do not have many Dells. They do not have many Kells either, of course, but the handling of the greater part of library materials requires both general knowledge and acquaintance with technique if the catalogue is to be anything
less than chaos. Ours is a wonderful profession for stumbling over pebbles. A card misfiled or a book misshelved and the seeker may be sent empty away. Ignorance of small devices of the craft can lead to error. To return to the theses, on one list part of a title was enclosed in square brackets. The entry was copied on to a slip by someone who probably knew that brackets indicate material supplanted who decided that the matter was too verbose and left out part of the bracketed phrase, with no indication of having done so. The next person, by nature suspicious, had a hunch, later verified, that the whole thing, brackets and all, was on the title page of the thesis. To go back to the beginning, the writer of the thesis did not know that, bibliographically, brackets mean something added or that it is unnecessary to enclose a subtitle, the compiler of the list did not know that when you do find square brackets in the original you indicate their presence by using angle brackets, the copier apparently did not know either this or the fact that you do for omission, in short a whole chain of collapse over a grain of sand, not even a pebble.

Perhaps lack of recognition, wherever it comes from, has something to do with lack of cataloguers and of bibliographers. Perhaps few people like to sit still and fiddle with angle brackets. Perhaps people like me should not reveal the seamy side like this. Whatever the reason, inability to get staff gives rise to some of our sorrows. We are criticized for what we do, but still more for what we do not do. Not all of the criticism is valid. For instance, it is believed that we do not enforce the deposit law. This is simply not true. The victims will testify to that. Especially, there is a demand for more cataloguing services, L.C. and Dewey numbers, subject headings and printed cards. This is perfectly legitimate, perfectly understandable. We are all clutching at straws. Technical processes are regarded as particularly difficult, particularly unattractive to personnel and particularly costly. Why, incidentally, administrators should expect to get something difficult for nothing is another question. These factors affect us, just as they affect other libraries. Not only have we lacked staff but provision of the services demanded present problems of some magnitude. It is not proper to publish Library of Congress numbers in competition with Library of Congress. Subject headings would have to be given in two languages and the devising of special Canadian headings is no light task. Subject headings cannot be made off the top of the head. They look specific but there is a concealed element of classification which must be considered, if headings are to be properly related to one another. Moreover, subject headings must be tested in use. Since, yet again, Canadiana is not a library catalogue, a great many of the entries would have to be redrafted.
before they could be usefully reproduced on cards. These are not insuperable difficulties but their solution does require time and staff. It should also be remembered that while Canadiana was our first, it is not our only, love. We have, In addition, our own house to put in order, and there is a vast amount of furniture to arrange, maybe a quarter of a million items. Nevertheless, the time approaches. We are within sight of bringing the cumulations up-to-date, we are renewing the attempt at a thesis list, both considered to be felt wants, and we are thinking about the next step. The most feasible and useful venture appears to be the addition of Dewey numbers to Canadiana. It would not, of course, be permissible to employ unauthorized expansions for Canada. It would have to be purest Dewey and, for practical reasons, taken from the latest edition. Given Dewey numbers it would seem highly desirable to arrange entries by those numbers, in the fashion of a shelf list or of the American Book Publishing Record or of Bibliographie de la France. We would drop entries under two subjects, to the delight of statisticians and some others. Dewey is not universally understood, notwithstanding James Dannerman, but the provision of an author and title index might save the list from being impossibly cryptic to anyone. D.C. arrangement, moreover, has the merit of international acceptance.

This reminds us that the really king size tribulation of bibliographers is classification. I will spare you the tale of its worst excesses, facet analysis, chain indexing and the rest. Canadiana has not yet been tossed into that whirlpool. Nor has it yet been fed to the machines.

And that, ladies and gentlemen, brings us to the end of this journey through the looking glass.

Jean Lunn