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# Charles Cutter, ex-président de l'American Library Association, curieux de la Bibliothèque Nationale

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## Résumé

En 1893, le célèbre bibliothécaire américain Charles Ammi Cutter (1837-1903), ancien président de l'*American Library Association*, reprenait le fameux article d'Henri Beraldi (1849-1931) intitulé *Voyage d'un livre à travers la Bibliothèque nationale : propos de bibliophile*, publié dans l'hebdomadaire de Gaston Tissandier *La Nature : revue des sciences et de leurs applications aux arts et à l'industrie*, les 17 juin, 1<sup>er</sup> et 29 juillet, 16 septembre 1893. Son adaptation était publiée dans la revue qu'il avait contribué à créer, *The Library journal* sous le titre de « Notes on the Bibliothèque Nationale ».

**Mots clefs** : Bibliothèque nationale de France, Charles Ammi Cutter (1837-1903), *American Library Association*

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<sup>1</sup> Bibliothèque nationale de France, Paris, France.

<sup>2</sup> Beraldi, Henri (1849-1931), *Voyage d'un livre à travers la Bibliothèque nationale : propos de bibliophile*, Paris : G. Masson, 1893, 1 vol. (45 p.-[4] f. de pl.) : ill. ; gr. in-8°. Disponible sur Internet, url : <https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k310727b>.

<sup>3</sup> Beraldi, Henri (1849-1931), « Voyage d'un livre à travers la Bibliothèque nationale, à Paris », *La Nature*, 17 juin 1893, n° 1046, p. 35-39. Disponible sur Internet, url : <https://cnum.cnam.fr/CGI/fpage.cgi?4KY28.41/39/100/536/5/420>.

<sup>4</sup> Beraldi, Henri (1849-1931), « Voyage d'un livre à travers la Bibliothèque nationale, à Paris », *La Nature*, 1<sup>er</sup> juillet 1893, n° 1048, p. 65-67. Disponible sur Internet, url : <https://cnum.cnam.fr/CGI/gpage.cgi?p1=65&p3=4KY28.41%2F100%2F536%2F5%2F420>.

<sup>5</sup> Beraldi, Henri (1849-1931), « Voyage d'un livre à travers la Bibliothèque nationale, à Paris », *La Nature*, 29 juillet 1893, n° 1052, p. 134-138. Disponible sur Internet, url : <https://cnum.cnam.fr/CGI/fpage.cgi?4KY28.41/138/100/536/5/420>.

<sup>6</sup> Beraldi, Henri (1849-1931), « Voyage d'un livre à travers la Bibliothèque nationale, à Paris », *La Nature*, 16 septembre 1893, n° 1059, p. 247-250. Disponible sur Internet, url : <https://cnum.cnam.fr/CGI/fpage.cgi?4KY28.41/251/100/536/5/420>.

<sup>7</sup> « Notes on the Bibliothèque Nationale », *The Library journal*, 1894, juin, vol. 19, n° 6, p. 193-194. Disponible sur Internet, url : [https://archive.org/details/sim\\_library-journal\\_1894-06\\_19\\_6/page/192/mode/2up](https://archive.org/details/sim_library-journal_1894-06_19_6/page/192/mode/2up).

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NOTES ON THE BIBLIOTHÈQUE NATIONALE.<sup>1</sup>

BY C: A. CUTTER.

C'est cet article que nous transcrivons ci-après. Les coquilles sont signalées d'un [sic] et nos notes introduites par des crochets carrés.

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## Notes on the Bibliothèque Nationale<sup>8</sup>

By C: A. CUTTER

M. BERALDI, in his monograph on the Bibliothèque Nationale, traces the course of a book through entry, cataloging, shelving, and circulation. Books come in three ways: from (1) gifts, about 3000 a year (M. Delisle is active in seeking valuable gifts); (2) purchase, 4500 (the library has \$20,000 a year to spend on books and binding); (3) copyright, 22,000 articles and 6000 pieces of music. The printer, not the publisher, is bound to make the deposit, so that if the text and the illustrations are printed at different places there is a chance, unless every one is careful, that the library will have an imperfect copy. But the greatest trouble comes from periodicals, of which the Bibliothèque Nationale receives 3000. What would some of our librarians think of this who are inclined to boast or to lament that they receive 300 ? Every number of every newspaper in France must be received, sent for if it fails to come, registered, put on its pile, and at the end of the year tied up in a bundle and put away (for only the most important are bound).

After the *Bureau des Entrées* has received, registered, gathered (to use a binder's term), cut, and bound (so far as the funds allow of binding)<sup>9</sup> the accessions, they come to the *Bureau du Catalogue*. Here a class-mark is given them, followed by the size-mark, and by the individual number of the book. This, it will be seen, is the "relative location" ; and it has been in use in the Bibliothèque Nationale for two centuries, though to American libraries it came as an entire novelty a generation ago. It is worth while to run through the classification:

A-Dbis Theology, 140,000 articles (receives annually 500 books of devotion, 50,000 in a century, occupying a kilometre of shelf room).

E-F Law, 160,000, including 12,000 theses.

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<sup>8</sup> Based on H: Beraldi's "Propos de bibliophile, voyage à travers la Bibliothèque Nationale" (Extrait du journal *La Nature*) Paris, G. Masson, 1893. See also, under "Bibliografy," report of the Com. des Bibliothèques Nationale et Municipale; and account of the "Catalogue of the National Library of France," from the *Nation*, printed elsewhere.

<sup>9</sup> Note that all books on return from the binders are kept for a month in a drying-room, to remove every trace of dampness. The galleries of many of our libraries would answer the same purpose.

G-Pbis History, 483,600, of which France has 260,000 in 400,000 volumes, Germany, 56,000, Great Britain, 14,000, America, 8000.

Q Bibliography, 73,000, of which 60,000 are library and sale catalogs.

R Philosophical, Moral, and Natural Sciences, 70,000.

S Natural science, 65,000.

T Medicine, 58,000, with 90,000 theses.

V Science and Arts, 120,000.

Vm Music, 16,000, besides about 200,000 single pieces of music.

X Linguistic and Rhetoric, 50,000.

Y Poetry and drama, 175,000, with 36,000 plays separately printed.

Ybis Novels, 105,000.

Z Polygraphy, 105,000.

Total, 1,800,000<sup>10</sup> marked articles, forming at least 2,000,000 volumes. But there are really many more articles, because various collections have only one number but contain many articles, e.g. the collection "Sociétés de secours mutuel," 17,000 pieces; "Compagnies des chemins de fer," 22,000; pieces of music, 200,000.

The titles of new books are printed in a bulletin in two series, French and Foreign (causing a printer's bill of 5000 francs a year). This began in 1875 for the foreign, and in 1882 for the French. These bulletins are cut up and the titles mounted on slips, which are fastened in a Leyden binder<sup>11</sup>, three making a small folio page. The result is a series of 900 volumes, less easy to consult than a good card catalog, very much less easy than the British Museum pasted catalog, the Rudolph books, or the Rudolph machine<sup>12</sup>. The Leyden books were probably adopted as being less costly for insertions of new titles than the old British Museum method of shifting titles so as to keep them in perfect order and every now and then taking volumes to pieces and rebinding them. But the new Museum method is easier. A column from the printed catalog is pasted on the left-hand side of the left-hand page of a folio book, and accessions are pasted over against this on the right-hand side and on both sides of

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<sup>10</sup> The number at the end of 1893, as given in the report of the Commission on the Catalogue, was more than 100,000 larger.

<sup>11</sup> [Il s'agit de classeurs à feuillets mobiles permettant de relier plusieurs rangées de fiches catalographiques comme la Bibliothèque nationale de France en conserve pour son premier « fichier matière », 1882-1979. Le terme de Leyden fait référence à l'entreprise *Leyden & Van Beest*, sise à Bruxelles, 9-11 rue d'Angleterre et à Rotterdam, et qui fournissait les bibliothèques en matériel de classement : meubles à fiches, boîtes, etc. Voir la réclame, url : <https://www.mot.be/webhdfs/v1/resource/RCB/44104/rcb044104.pdf> et l'ensemble des catalogues conservés par le musée MOT, url : <https://www.mot.be/resource/Organisation/leyden-van-beest?lang=fr>.]

<sup>12</sup> [Du nom de l'invention d'Alexander Joseph Rudolph (1850-1917), qui fut bibliothécaire adjoint de la *Newberry library* de 1894 à 1911 et inventa le *Rudolph Continuous Indexer* visible sur la page : Nix, Larry T., « The Rudolph Continuous Indexer », *The Library History Buff*, 20 janvier 2008. Disponible sur Internet, url : <https://www.libraryhistorybuff.org/rudolph.htm> et Teller, Alex, « Before There Was the Card Catalog, There Was the Rudolph Continuous Indexer », *Open More Than Books*, 6 avril 2022. Disponible sur Internet, url : <https://www.newberry.org/blog/before-there-was-the-card-catalog-there-was-the-rudolph-continuous-indexer>.]

the right-hand page. But although this method is easy, it has two very great objections: (1) the pages will soon get entirely full, when either the titles must all be raised, rearranged, and pasted, or a copy of the catalog and of all the lists of additions must be cut up, arranged, and mounted. (2) The second evil is more important. Many persons do not think of looking beyond the first column, and even when they do, it requires close attention, long before the then right-hand columns get full, to make sure that the title sought is not in the catalog. In the book of requests people are continually asking the Museum to procure works which it has already, and of course the book of requests reveals but a small part of the mistakes of this sort that are made, for proportionately few persons take the trouble to ask for books which they do not find.

The books received at the Bibliothèque Nationale before 1875 and 1882 are entered on some 2,000,000 slips, which are divided between two catalogs, that of the old library (*fonds ancien*), and of the intermediate library (*fonds intermédiaire* [sic]). In each of these catalogs they are arranged in series according to the subject divisions given above and under each subject alphabetically. There is no author catalog and the public are not allowed to consult these catalogs. If then a reader asks for a work received before 1875 the attendant guesses in which *fonds* it is and what subject it treats of; if he does not find it where he looks first he tries some other division. No wonder it takes on an average half an hour for the reader to get his book. I must bear witness to the great skill which necessity has developed in the officials charged with this work. Some of their successes in bringing me out-of-the-way books were marvellous. On the other hand, when they reported certain works not in the library I did not feel at all sure that they were right, and I dare say they doubted themselves. All this will be changed when the library gets a printed alphabetical catalog of authors and has made from it a pasted alphabetical catalog of subjects. The author catalog, by the way, is expected to fill 40,000 double-columned quarto pages.

Pointing with pride to the fact that the classification has such great antiquity, M. Beraldi remarks that “since the time of Louis XIV, the library has never interrupted its service a single day [excepting, of course, Sundays and fête-days, and the annual fortnight for cleaning] ; it would, therefore, have been physically impossible for it to have undertaken the great work of rearrangement.” Surely a *non sequitur*. Even with the fixed location it is possible — tho not easy — to rearrange without stopping the circulation; but with a movable location there is no need whatever of interruption. The particular books one is dealing with on any one day are of course kept from the reader just as the books which are sent to the binder are for a little while out of service ; but with organization and care and a disposition to accommodate on the part of the classifiers the detention will seldom be perceptible to those who use the library.

After the books are classified and cataloged they are put into the stock (*magasins*). The library now has 50 kilometres (31 miles) of shelves and is full. A new store-house is needed and a public reading-room (*salle de lecture*), which can be lighted by electricity, and be opened, like the British Museum, in the evening. It is intended to build on one corner of the block occupied by the library. Fourteen years ago the dwelling-houses covering this ground, which were a constant menace to the library, were torn down. A commission then urgently recommended the immediate construction of much-needed additions; but money was wanted for the army, and for the navy — on which the late investigation shows that it has been utterly wasted — and for railroads and canals that would win votes in doubtful districts; so that the needed “credit” has never been obtained. It is to be hoped that the printing of the catalog will not suffer a similar fate.

From the plan it seems as if the new book-house could much better be built upon the vacant garden, where it would be directly contiguous to the great students' reading-room (*salle de travail*), than on the lot mentioned above, which is farther removed. The service of books, already too slow, runs the risk of being still further delayed. But no doubt the authorities have carefully considered all possible plans and know *pros* and *cons* of each which are not visible to the public. The ground at their disposal, if properly built upon, is ample to provide storage for as many books as they have at present. May they soon be able to commence construction.

Olivier Jacquot (BnF)

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