

INTRODUCTION.

HOWEVER they may differ on the subject of cataloguing, librarians are agreed that books should be arranged on the shelves according to subjects. Experience teaches that it is impossible to attach too much importance to the advantages flowing from a wise and methodical order in the arrangement of a library. It is when it comes to systems of classification that experts—a limited number—begin to differ; and the reason is not far to seek. It is mainly because of the hardness of the task, which is so great that Aristotle, who executed it for the King of Egypt, was said by Strabo to be the only man who was ever able to arrange the books of a large library in an orderly and systematic manner. From that time to the present, the classification of human knowledge has occupied, more or less, the attention of some of the wisest of mankind, including such men as Bacon, Leibnitz, D'Alembert, and Coleridge. I refrain from wearying you with an account of the various systems which have been put forward from age to age. Those who wish to examine the history of the subject, will find it set down in detail in Woodward's *System of Universal Science* (Philadelphia, 1816). Suffice it to say that the genius of orderly arrangement seems, in modern times, to have taken up its special abode with the French, who have succeeded as well in classifying books as they have in ordering some other things usually considered more important.

The system of dividing a library into five classes—Theology, Jurisprudence, Sciences and Arts, Belles Lettres, and History, the whole followed or preceded by Bibliography—is commonly ascribed to the great French bibliographer, G. F. De Bure, a bookseller of Paris (1731–1782); but he appears to have merely adopted the plan of his predecessor in the same business, Gabriel Martin (1679–1761), who himself borrowed from Jean Garnier's *Systema bibliothecæ collegii Parisiensis Societatis Jesu* (1678). The plan, being found to work well in practice, has since been commonly followed in the catalogues and libraries of France, and, indeed, of the Continent generally; and in the arrangement of its books on the shelves, a system not very different is now practised at the British Museum. This plan was also deliberately adopted, but not without valuable improvements in detail, in the preparation of his catalogue of the Philadelphia Library (1835) by my learned and painstaking predecessor, the late George Campbell. That classified catalogue was a thorough and scholarly piece of work, to which was added a copious alphabetical Index; but in the mean time the Philadelphia Library had no classification on the shelves, it being probably the only large collection of books in the world where the volumes were arranged by sizes only, and in the order of accession. The defects of that system—or want of system—were so serious that, on the occasion of removing the Loganian Library and the greater part of the books of the Library Company, in 1878, to the Ridgway Branch, the opportunity was embraced to make a more logical disposition of them on the shelves, and one based, as to its main features, on the

