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THE CARD-CATALOGUE SYSTEM ADAPTED TO
MUSEUM REQUIREMENTS.

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In a thoroughly up-to-date Museum there must always be going on an active exchange of specimens with kindred institutions in other countries. To catalogue the collections in such an establishment may in itself be a matter of some difficulty. If one is content merely to enter the names and particulars of current acquisitions in a book form register, and rule out, or otherwise mark, entries representing specimens sent away, nothing could be simpler. Such a register, however, cannot be kept in systematic order: a great disadvantage when dealing with Natural History specimens, and hours may be spent in tracking the source of any particular object.

In dealing with the large number of specimens under my care at the Museum, namely, Mammals, Reptiles, Fishes, and all Osteological preparations, I had the inadequacy of the usual form of register for ordinary working purposes, forcibly brought home to me; for my own convenience, therefore, I duplicated the record of current donations, etc., according to the plan below referred to.

Eighteen months ago the Curator instructed me to prepare a catalogue of the duplicate Mammals available for exchange, and for this purpose I was provided with an additional register. I then explained what system I had instituted, and the Curator heartily approving, permission was accorded me to officially adopt it in the Institution, as referred to in his Annual Report for 1898.*

The Curator's remarks were based on a six months' trial, during which time a comparatively small catalogue only had been prepared. All the collections in the various sections previously mentioned are being catalogued on this plan, and so far the work has occupied an assistant nearly the whole of the eighteen months indicated.

Many important libraries are now catalogued by the "card" system, and it is simply an adaptation of this to Museum requirements that I desire to bring into notice. Once a book is placed in a library it usually remains there, and if worn out is merely replaced, the substituted book bearing the reference number of the discarded one; changes occur only by interpolating new volumes. With a museum collection the case is different, for, in addition to the new material, specimens are constantly being removed by exchange, and old examples can never be actually replaced, for unlike a book, each has an individuality of its own, depending on locality, age, sex, season, or other condition.

* Aust. Mus. Ann. Report, 1898 (1899), p. 6.

A museum catalogue should be adapted to include the following:

I. Exhibited Collection.

- a. Valuable specimens, or single representatives of a species, not necessarily in good condition.
- b. Permanent specimens which may reasonably be supposed to be the best procurable.
- c. Indifferent specimens retained only until better examples are procured.

II. Duplicate Collection.

- d. Reserve—Specimens not at present required for exhibition, but too rare to be parted with.
- e. Store—Specimens available for exchange.

III. Type Collection, if not exhibited. It is also necessary to indicate whether the specimens are mounted, in skins, or are preserved in fluid.

As implied by the name, the system consists of indexing by means of loose cards instead of by the ordinary book method. A card is issued for every individual specimen, and upon it written the name of the object and all information concerning it; it is in fact a copy of the collector's ticket, together with the registration and other marks, as Gallery, Duplicate, Type. These cards stand on edge in drawers specially constructed to receive them, and may be arranged in any way desired: the height of the card is less than that of the drawer, so that a deeper series may be inserted, these latter, standing up above the others, are to receive the names of the Orders or Families, etc., and may be of distinctive colour. When properly placed, a card or series of cards may be inserted anywhere or a similar series withdrawn without disturbing the general arrangement.

This system, as I have applied it, is not intended to take the place of the ordinary register, but rather to be a key to the collections: the register would record all specimens received in chronological order, but the changes made in the collections would be indicated by the card catalogue.

I have here done no more than indicate the system, for the arrangement of a catalogue depends so much on the nature and number of the specimens dealt with, and the fancy of their custodian. Personally, I have adopted two cabinets for each section, one to contain the cards of the exhibited, and the other those of the duplicate collections.

For full information as to the working of the card system as used for library purposes, the publications of the Boston Library Bureau (U.S.A.) and of the Manchester Museum may be consulted.
