

Book Reviews

A World Bibliography of Bibliographies.

Theodore Besterman. Printed for the author at the University Press, Oxford, and published by him at 98 Heath street, London, N.W. 3. Sole agents for North and South America: The H. W. Wilson Co., New York, 1939-40. 2 vols. \$60.

THIS ambitious title and the extravagant claims in the Introduction are not confirmed by the work itself. It does contain some titles lacking in other bibliographies but is not exhaustive in any field; accuracy was attempted but not enough to guarantee reliability; self-imposed limitations and plain immaturity of judgment restrict the final product deplorably.

An example.—A research student hunting for material on church history in France will find four titles on page 266, volume I. If he wants to consult the first item, Lacombe's *Essai d'une bibliographie des ouvrages relatifs à l'histoire religieuse de Paris*, he may be prevented from locating a copy just because Besterman did not add the simple information that it is an "Extrait du Bulletin d'histoire et d'archaeologie, janvier, 1884." Besterman sometimes gives a series- or extract-note; the cases where he does not are very numerous. But more serious still is the fact that only four bibliographies are here mentioned out of a possible eight or more. And, incidentally, it is curious that Germany, Austria, Italy, Sweden, and Switzerland are omitted in the list of countries under "Ecclesiastical history," whereas their church histories have resulted in a number of bibliographies.

Definition of field.—Besterman tried

to set reasonable limits but defined his terms in such a way as to exclude what would inevitably be expected. "Separately published bibliographies"—each of the three words gets you into trouble: Will you omit the best bibliography on Christian Science because it is in E. F. Dakin's book, *Mrs. Eddy* (New York, 1930), and not separately published? Besterman does. Will you omit the most extensive bibliography of Christian hymns in existence just because it is still in manuscript, not yet published? Besterman omits bibliographies in manuscript. Will you omit very scholarly booksellers' catalogs, catalogs of special libraries, handbooks of the literature of certain subjects which are not strictly bibliographical in form? Besterman says he does, but he makes exceptions. "The inclusion of specialized commercial catalogues would have at least trebled the size of the present bibliography, an increase ludicrously out of proportion to the resulting gain," is a ludicrous remark. It is true that to find all of the lists appended to books and in magazine articles would be an almost infinite undertaking; and yet it cannot be said that the search would be "unprofitable, since the vast majority of the resulting millions [!] of entries would be without value." If it is the compiler's purpose to serve the researcher, he should pursue the search in each subject far enough to locate the important bibliographies and then give a hint as to what is beyond the pale.

Form of entry.—Having to choose between the "short-title" entry and the full transcription of titles, Besterman says that his practice is to use "the shortest possible form consistent with intelligibility and an

adequate indication of the scope of the bibliography." It would be easy to give scores of examples showing that he often stops short of giving as much information as would be helpful.

Scope.—Besterman emphasizes the claim that his work "aims at completeness and internationality." Yet we find that he worked almost entirely in the British Museum and with the services of the National Central Library; and a glance at his pages reveals that they are very heavily weighted in favor of Great Britain. "Great Britain" as a topic takes 62 columns, "America," 17, "France," 14, "Germany," 7, and "Italy" 6. If he had gone in for indexes to government documents of the other countries as he did for his own country, the proportions would have been different. But not having visited the Preussische Staatsbibliothek in Berlin, the Kongelige Bibliotek in Copenhagen, the Koninklijke Bibliotheek in The Hague, the Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, the Library of Congress, etc., he could not be familiar with their holdings—but then why make such a claim of "internationality?"

Arrangement.—The Introduction delivers a diatribe against the classified arrangement for a bibliography, with some good points and some weak ones. The main advantage to the alphabetical topical scheme used here is the avoidance of subjects in the index. But the topical plan involves ambiguities aplenty, an important one of which is the failure to associate kindred subjects. Some of the space saved is lost again when certain titles have to be repeated in a number of places.

Miscellaneous comments.—The work is handsomely done and has ordinary virtues not listed here. However, a few stray

reflections: The place of publication of an English work published in London is omitted, and of a French work published in Paris. This is explained in the Introduction; but it would not have added much trouble to have printed these small words where needed. Only one place is given: "Lipsiae," for "Lipsiae et Hamburgi." Publishers are not mentioned as a rule. The pagination methods are confusing. Accents on Greek words are omitted. Full names and dates of authors are not attempted. Numerous typographical (?) errors are evident. To save space, comments are omitted. Instead, the number of titles in each bibliography is indicated in square brackets. This has a value, but (e.g.) to give the information that a certain work has "[300.]" entries doesn't help much when it happens that that particular bibliography is practically worthless. The student would prefer that the space given to detailed collations for volumes of some long serial sets had been used for critical comments throughout.

Are abridgements of specifications for boxes, brushing and sweeping, casks, cement, chains, clocks, etc., really bibliographical material? Abbreviations are not explained; some are self-evident.

An exhaustive list of omissions would involve re-doing the job for Besterman. The reviewer made a list of scores of to-be-expected but not-found bibliographies dealing with religious subjects; but perhaps enough has been said to prove that this *World Bibliography of Bibliographies* lacks completeness as well as dependability.—*John Barrow, Berea College, Berea, Ky.*

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