Book Reviews

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Book Review Editor

GILCHRIST, Alan, ed. **From classification to "knowledge organization": Dorking revisited or "Past is prelude". A collection of reprints to commemorate the forty year span between the Dorking conference and the Sixth International Study Conference on Classification Research, London (U.K.)** The Hague: FID, 1997. xiv, 185 p. (FID occasional paper, 14). ISBN 92-6600-714-5.

This is a collection of fifteen milestone papers of the onward march of classification research since the epoch-making first International Study Conference on Classification Research (famous as the Dorking Conference 1957). The occasion was the sixth such conference in the series, which was held in London in 1997 and marked a return to England after forty years. Some of the 1957 participants were invited, and all participants of the 1997 conference were taken to Dorking for a social evening to relive those historical and golden days. The book includes reprints of select papers which depict the trends in classification at that time.

The collection has been divided into four sections: Dorking legacy, New tools, Testing, and Questions and answers. In the first section, the reader will find reminiscences by some of the stalwart participants and their reflections on the social and academic value of the first conference. The section reprints the famous CRG Manifesto (1957) on the need for faceted classifications, and E.J. Coates paper (1977) suggesting that there had been no real progress in the use of classification for information retrieval between 1957 and 1977, the interest and research emphasis having shifted to the design of thesauri.

The New tools section includes two papers by B. C. Vickery, and a joint paper by Karen Sparck-Jones and David Lewis. Vickery (1971) explores the varied structures and the many functions of retrieval languages, and identifies the most suitable structures needed for different purposes. In his second article (1986), he discusses knowledge representation in different fields such as information science, artificial intelligence, psychology and linguistics, and suggests the design of a prototype expert system to make use of the techniques and structures of such disciplines. Sparck-Jones and Lewis (1996) explore the properties of automatic text retrieval, reviewing various specific natural language processing strategies for information processing.

The third section, Testing, contains three papers. The first paper is by C.W. Cleverdon and J. Mills (1963) on the famous and classic Cranfield project for testing retrieval efficiency of indexing languages. Dagobert Soergel (1994) defines the characteristics of indexing that influence retrieval and concludes that retrieval performance depends on query formulation. Karen Sparck-Jones (1995) discusses the structure of the Text Retrieval Conference (TREC) program and the methods for testing indexing and retrieval.

In the last section, Questions and answers, there is a letter by Carl Keren (1984) to an editor about the doubtful value of research in information science. A defending rejoinder by Gerald Salton follows. Elaine Svenonius (1986) adopts a historical viewpoint to examine the uses of free-text versus controlled vocabularies and makes some suggestions for the design of retrieval tools. Jessica Milstead (1994) makes a plea for research in indexing, especially on its human and users aspects. Michael Weiner and Elizabeth Licley (1996) deal with the conveyance of technologies and the growing power of information technologies. Peggy Zorn and others (1996) offer very practical tips for searching on the Web. Lastly, Bruce Croft (1995) explains what is expected from a good quality IR system: integrated solutions, distributed IR, efficient and flexible indexing and retrieval, flexible vocabulary, effective interfaces and browsing, routing and filtering, effective retrieval, multimedia retrieval, information extraction, and relevant feedback.

This is a collection of the most influential papers on retrieval techniques and tools ranging from theory to most pragmatic questions that were published between 1957 and 1996. This selection, though judicious, may not satisfy all or many, but it remains a treasure trove of classification history. Recent papers appraise us of the current trends in classification and

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indexing retrieval. Nowhere else has classification been portrayed in its varied and diverse forms as an efficient tool for information retrieval. In this collection, the emphasis is not on the nostalgic past but on the past as prelude to future developments. It shows the continuity of research from the manual methods to the availability of most powerful and versatile information processing machines. But classification still requires a lot of human intelligence and judgment.

Minor typos here and there do not mar an otherwise attractive and useful volume.

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Professor P.N. Kaula, a staunch proponent and an able and indefatiguable apostle of Ranganathan, has had a long cherished desire to establish a journal exclusively devoted to Ranganathan studies. Professor Kaula has an abiding faith in the profundity and continuing relevance of Ranganathan theories in this information age and in the electronic environment. Indeed he is personally committed to Ranganathan, and remains his outstanding adherent today: nobody seems to have so enthusiastically worked to propagate Ranganathan's name and ideology as he.

The birth of the journal got delayed by Professor Kaula's quest to find a suitable person to whom the editorial responsibility could be delegated. At last, he himself had to assume the mantle! Publication of the maiden issue is certainly an event to be celebrated and for which Kaula with his intransigent will gets the entire credit. The *Ranganathan Research Bulletin* is the first journal entirely devoted to a school of thought in our profession.

The *Bulletin* is an offspring of the *Herald of Library Science* (1962-) which it closely resembles in format, nature and presentation.

In his introduction, editor-in-chief Kaula describes Ranganathan as a "super human" with unbound energy and single minded devotion to the profession. He laments that Ranganathan's thoughts and works have not been studied properly, nor comprehensively. Projecting Ranganathan's work as the Indian school of thought, Kaula makes a dig at Ranganathan's (un)grateful disciples and beneficiaries for not coming forward to reinterpret and propagate the master's intellectual legacy. Professor Kaula has indeed proved true to his salt! Then he refers to Ranganathan's letters lying with him and in custody of numerous other colleagues; such letters will be published piecemeal in the *Bulletin*. In addition, there are numerous unpublished library plans and memoranda submitted by Ranganathan to various agencies. In the next issue, a list of such documents will be given as a first step towards publishing them one by one.

The *Bulletin's* main objectives are to encourage and publish research on Ranganathan, to re-publish Ranganathan's views on given topics in the form of short excerpts from his writings, and to answer questions on Ranganathan's methods and theories. In a nutshell, the *Bulletin* editor wants members of our profession to rediscover the greatness of Ranganathan by showing his continued relevance, and to impress it upon the Web-obsessed generation hooked to networks and surfing in cyberspace. It is a noble plan to keep alive the thoughts and work of Ranganathan, as it is clearly stated in the editorial policy of the journal.

Most of these features are available in the inaugural issue. Section B is on the importance of Ranganathan's work by one of his foremost admirers, Dr Ingetraut Dahlberg. This is followed by a strong plea to revise the Colon classification. Section D contains a piece by J.M. Perrault entitled "Citation order: assumptions". The previous texts are old, but still apt and relevant writings. Section E reproduces Ranganathan's letters to colleagues, as well as a more recent letter written by Edward Dudley to an Indian scholar. Section F is a description of a recent book of Ranganathan's quotations. Section G presents Ranganathan's views on "Topics of research". Lastly, Section H reports on some events on Ranganathan celebrations.

At the moment, the *RRB* is a digest of Ranganathan studies aimed at the common librarian and at the Ranganathan scholars alike. Judging by the contents of the first issue, and on the stature and experience of editor-in-chief Kaula, it is slated to be an important forum and an effective medium to propagate Ranganathan's ideology and school of thought. Professor Kaula imparts it his midas touch. As such, it is a welcome addition to the still growing family of traditional journals in our field.

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