

A
Course
in Correct
CATALOGUING
or Notes to
The Neophyte

Compiled & Arranged by

DAVID MAGEE



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The Two Parts
Now First Collected & Reissued
in the Author's Honor by His Colleagues
in the NCC/ABAA

With a Preface by James D. Hart



SAN FRANCISCO 1977

Preface

DAVID MAGEE began his distinguished career as a rare books dealer when he left his native London at the age of nineteen for what was to become his second home-city of San Francisco. Over the following fifty years and more he has become one of the great antiquarian booksellers of his adopted country, whose succession of intimate stores, all possessed of their owner's warmth and charm, became known to serious bibliophiles everywhere. His own reputation led to his election in 1967 as President of the Antiquarian Book Sellers' Association of America.

David Magee's career has been highly respected but it has never been starchy nor overly serious. A lively humor and lots of laughter have always been basic elements of David Magee's personality. Although he created great bibliographies (of the Grabhorn Press and of the Book Club of California) that laid out the particulars of title page after title page from rubricated initial letter down to the last mark of punctuation, even before these volumes were printed, he published *Jam Tomorrow*, a witty, light-hearted novel. And when he came to collect books for himself, the author he chose to concentrate upon was P. G. Wodehouse.

His own memoirs, *Infinite Riches*, have none of the solemnity or grandeur suggested by their title derived from an Elizabethan play. Instead, they are full of amusing anecdotes concerning people and places and adventures encountered by an attrac-

tively easy-going rare book dealer. This volume of reminiscences is urbane but never lofty, informative but never grave. The publisher's designer suggested its tone on the jacket, whose front cover displays a row of handsome old volumes but whose rear shows superimposed upon them a photograph of two men—David Magee and his book-selling friend Jack Reynolds—walking in the waters of the beach at Santa Barbara, their proper gray flannel trousers informally rolled to the knee as they stroll barefooted at the edge of the surf chatting cosily, doubtless about rare books.

That kind of spirit also lies behind the charmingly witty *Course in Correct Cataloguing* and its sequel, *The 2nd Course . . .*, done for the delight of a few knowing bibliophiles who were friends of the author and the printer, Lawton Kennedy, and members of the quite informal Roxburghe and Zamorano Clubs. Now, almost twenty years after the first *Course* was privately printed in an edition limited to but 100 copies, more people with bookish interests may at last have the pleasure of reading these entertaining texts on a topic that persons with less humor might well think of as most unlikely material for fun.

Here is good fun in a wonderful parody, a literary form too little practiced and always hard to carry off. The genre is difficult because one must know one's subject intimately to burlesque it, and at the same time see it from a distance that allows for good natured observation of its oddities. This is just what David Magee achieves by treating his unlikely material with delightful wit and light-hearted ridicule.

JAMES D. HART

To the Gentle Reader

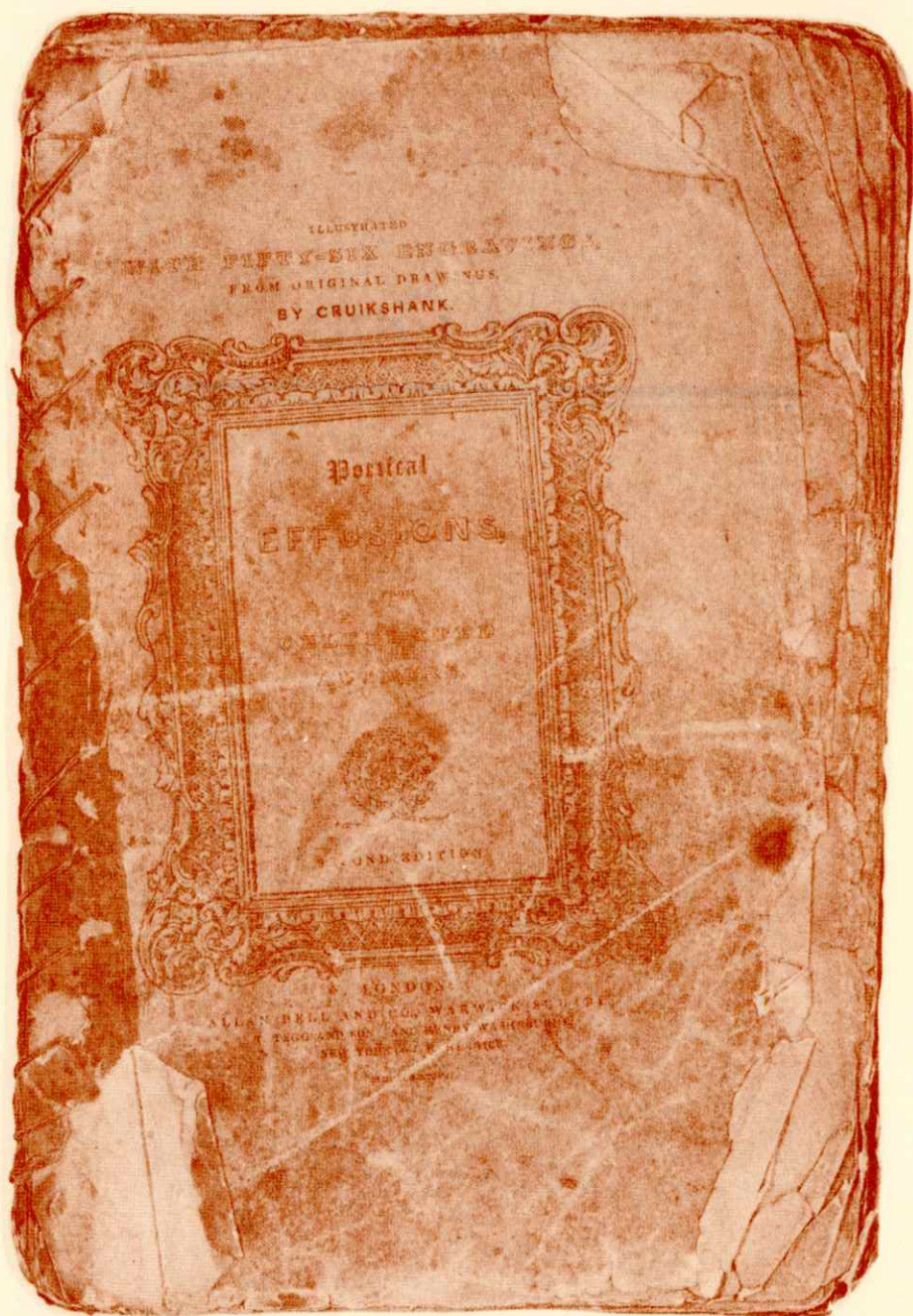
EVERY TRADE has its language. Plumbers, printers and, for all I know, prostitutes have terms of reference by which they communicate with each other and their clients. The book trade is no exception. It has a language of an ancient, rich and vari-tongued complexion, perfectly understandable to the fraternity though perplexing perhaps to the uninitiated. This bibliographical jargon, by means of which the purveyor of books sells his wares, is as old as books themselves. For centuries cataloguers have been employing it, unswerving in their devotion to tradition. This is as it should be: antiquarians are not supposed to be innovators.

But of late a disturbing element has crept into the book trade—a group of youthful iconoclasts who have dared to tamper with Holy Writ. They are not content with the innocent half-truths, evasions and exaggerations by which the bookseller in the past has extolled the virtues or cloaked the defects of his goods; they prefer to speak without trumpets and they know not when to tread delicately. The result is honest, insipid, and dangerously comprehensible. They have the words, as Mark Twain once remarked in another connection, but they haven't got the tune.

This "guide" is addressed to these non-conformists. It is hoped that by steady application to its pages the most recalcitrant and unmusical of cataloguers may learn the right, the only, the *traditional* tune.

D.M.

Part One



"very slightly worn"

The Course:

à BECKETT, A.: It is traditional in any general catalogue of literature to open with this gentleman whose historical comicality is about as enlivening as a statue of Rutherford B. Hayes. If you wish to flout tradition you may hide Mr. à Beckett under the heading of *humor*. This is not sporting; neither is it accurate. (See ZOLA.)

ANNOTATIONS: If these are in an early printed book and quite unreadable they can safely be labeled "scholarly." Pencil scribbblings by dirty-minded little boys are seldom scholarly.

BINDINGS: There are many adjectives to apply to these. Start with "neat" or "pretty" and wind up with "magnificent" or "sumptuous." This last is usually reserved for bindings encrusted with semi-precious stones (the *Rubaiyat* is the customary vehicle for such rich masonry) or books whose front covers are beautified (if that is the right word) by inlaid miniatures of insipid females wearing Gainsborough hats. In the unlikely event that you are cataloguing a finely bound copy of, say, *The Little Head-Shrinkers*, or *What the Fifth Form did to Miss Bracegirdle*, you may bring out your loudest gun and describe the binding as "scrumptious."

BLANKS: Stress their importance when your book happens to possess them.

CABLE ADDRESS: This should be prominently displayed in the front of your catalogue to give the impression that you do an international business. It should be a compound word no one can understand, pronounce or spell. Western Union won't like you, but what the hell! They don't buy books.

CURIOSA: A curtain behind which to hide the erotic adventures of rakes, trulls, pimps and other assorted liars.

DEROME: Any French 18th century volume in red morocco should be attributed to this overworked binder.

DUERER, A.: Any unidentifiable 16th century engravings may be attributed to this talented fellow. It is well to confine your attribution to German books. And to those published during the artist's lifetime.

FIRST ISSUE: If your copy has the dropped "o" on page 49 stress it like mad. And don't forget to double the price.

FORE-EDGE PAINTING: These are always "exquisitely executed" even when done by someone's Aunt Esmeralda on a wet Sunday afternoon.

FOXING: This is always "slight."

ILLUSTRATIONS: We are all children at heart and

love pictures. Aquatints, mezzotints—engravings of all kinds—should always be labeled “splendid impressions.” French engravings should be described as “curious.” This will result in a land-office business.

LARGE PAPER: Any book with margins of an inch or better. It was the custom at the turn of the century to blow up duodecimos to the size of folios, the text in 2 point type, lying in the center of a huge expanse of white paper like so many fly-specks. Such editions should be described as “dainty.”

N. B. This booklet is on *extra* large paper, and *very* dainty.

LIBRARY STAMPS: These are always “faint”—especially if you have tried to erase them.

MINIATURE BOOK: Something almost as big as a doll’s reticule and just about as useless. If a few words of type are visible with the aid of a strong magnifying-glass it may be described as “readable.” Miniature books are always “charming,” “dainty,” “bijou” or any other adjective that comes to mind—such as “pestilential.”

MINT: If it has a dust-wrapper it’s mint, or, if you prefer it, “pristine.”

NAME ON FLYLEAF: This defect can sometimes be turned into a virtue (very minor) by a glance through the Dictionary of National Biography. This is particularly true of 16th and 17th century books. For

example, the name "John Bogglesnaithe" may be scribbled on an endpaper. Look him up in the D.N.B. and you will find:

BOGGLESNAITHE, JOHN (1649-1720), vicar of St. Osythe, Llynllffydd, N. Wales; private chaplain to the fourth Earl of Marshmallow, curator of the Llynllffydd Museum, famous for its collection of stuffed owls.

Thus *name on flyleaf* becomes: *copy once owned by John Bogglesnaithe, famous 17th century divine, antiquarian and ornithologist.*

OCTAVO: A convenient size designation when you are not quite sure.

ONLY KNOWN COPY: Don't forget to add "excessively rare"; people are so stupid.

PRIVATELY PRINTED: Books labeled thus smack of pornography. Do not discourage this, especially if the item you are cataloguing happens to be a translation from the French or Persian. And what goes on in a Persian garden—really!!

RARE: Apply to any book you have not seen before.

RARE IN THIS STATE: Apply to any book in boards, uncut. Be careful that the printer doesn't capitalize "state."

REBACKED: Qualify with "skillfully" or "neatly" to

prove that you don't send your books for repair to the local blacksmith.

STAINS: These should never be identified. Blood, jam and ink all look like cocoa after 200 years.

SUPPRESSED: Always a good selling word, connoting, as it does, spicy reading. It must be remembered, however, that the first edition of *Alice in Wonderland* was suppressed, and despite what Freud might have to say about its author's fondness for taking photographs of little girls in the nude, Alice and her companions in Wonderland are fully clothed and models of rectitude.

TAIL-PIECE: To many this may not sound like a bibliographical term. The French, with unaccustomed delicacy, use the phrase "cul-de-lampe." You may employ this, if you like, and perhaps win a reputation for being bilingual. But that's about all you will win.

THIRD EDITION: These are always hard to sell. If you can, however, discover a three-line preface or a couple of corrected spellings you may with all honesty describe your book as "Third (and best) edition."

TRIMMED: This should refer to the edges of a book, not the customer who buys it.

UNCUT: Anything that has a ragged edge.

UNEXPURGATED: A word *everyone* understands.

UNIQUE: A dangerous word, but it sounds good.

UNOPENED: Be careful, this can indicate a mint copy of something no one wants to open.

UNRECORDED IN . . . "Unrecorded in Shuttlecock, Finkelbaum or Magee" is a statement which not only makes your item sound rare but will give the impression that you have a vast reference library.

VERY SLIGHTLY WORN: *See frontispiece.*

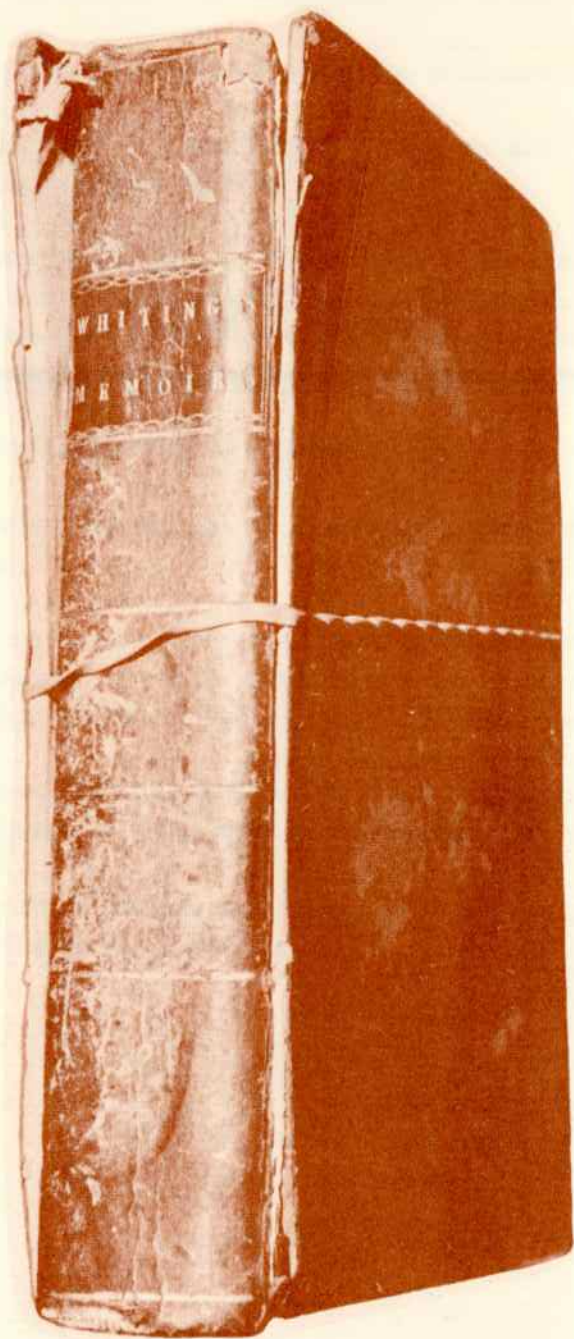
WING: "Not in" are the magic words that precede this.

WORM HOLES: These occur only in the margins. It is assumed that book worms do not care for the taste of printer's ink, or perhaps they are not great readers.

ZOLA: The final gun in any general catalogue of literature. He is an unloved Frenchman these days.

ZANGWILL (English and equally unloved) is a good alternative. (See à BECKETT.)

Part Two



"hinges trifle weak"

The 2nd Course

A₁ BLANK (?): If your book lacks A₁ it is considered fair play (provided this leaf is not the title-page) to assume it to be a blank. That handy little question mark absolves you from blame should it prove otherwise.

BURNISHED: A splendid adjective when applied to the gold in illuminated manuscripts. It connotes loving hands of medieval monks giving a bit of spit and polish to their handiwork.

COLOR BY HAND: Illustrations so treated are always "superbly" or "delicately" done. Plates over which one's first-born has labored lovingly with a purple crayon are not in this category. They may, incidentally, make a once doting father think that Herod had something.

CRISP: A pretty adjective, though perhaps more applicable to the leaves of lettuce than to those of books. It is *not* a synonym for "brittle," as in "burnt to a crisp."

CROPPED: Should there be any trace of catchword or numeral showing after the binder's knife has mutilated the margins, you may say "margins slightly trimmed." If you are subject to fits of conscience you can add "affecting some catchwords and numerals." If the top and bottom lines of text are

gone—God help you. You're on your own.

N.B. There still exist, alas, a few binders who dearly love to wield a knife. For these butchers there should be reserved a special rim of Hell where every day one hundredth of an inch is sliced from the tenderer portions of their anatomy.

DIVINITY CALF: A dark and somber type of binding, blind stamped, reserved for collections of sermons and other theological tedia. Such bindings are of so sacerdotal a hue as to tempt the cataloguer to describe the works thus enshrined as "bound in full clergyman."

EXTRA-ILLUSTRATED VOLUMES: The embellishing of dull books by the insertion of illustrations from other dull books. The manufacture of these pedigreed scrapbooks was at one time a favorite parlor game. The rules were simple: you found the most unreadable volume in your library and then burdened it with sufficient pictures to warrant extending the work to twelve large, "choicely" bound tomes. Histories of obscure English parishes, compiled by retired clergymen, were usually judged the winner.

When cataloguing such illustrative bric-a-brac you must avoid the text, for no one is going to care greatly about the story of Little Wombly-under-the-Womb (pronounced Wum), and three feet of it, however "sumptuously" encased by Mr. Riviere or Mr. Zaehnsdorf, it is just about three feet too much. You must concentrate on the illustrations. You will

find among these a rich plenty of steel engravings (culled from Victorian "gift editions") displaying maidens, their necks as arched as those of Arabian horses, languishing at casement windows; or Byronic warriors, moustachioed and wearing on their heads what looks suspiciously like old stockings. What these characters have to do with Little Wombly-under-the-Womb is not for you to say. You are a bookseller, not a clairvoyant. Refer to them as "quaint", if you can, or skip to the colored plates. Everyone likes a spot of color. Remember, all aquatints are "brilliant impressions." Should they be faded make a virtue of age and call them "mellowed."

Should your white elephant be further enhanced by the insertion of original watercolors, bring your biggest guns to bear. Thus, pallid views of Anne Hathaway's cottage, Warwick Castle or Cows at Eventide (the result of Great-Aunt Ermintrude's summer holiday in the Cotswolds) become: "Exquisite watercolors by an unknown artist of exceptional ability, highly reminiscent of, and possibly by -----," you name him, you liar.

FLAWS: These are always "natural." Tears, holes, bites, thin spots, etc., found in any early printed book are, as it were, acts of God—never those of rats, mice, children or other desecrators of ancient tomes.

GOTHIC HAND: In illuminated manuscripts this is always "neat."

HALF-TITLES: Very important when your item happens to possess them.

HINGES TRIFLE WEAK: It is not necessary to mention the rubber band that holds the covers on.

INLAID LEAVES: This usually means that at one time the margins were mouse-bitten, badly frayed or otherwise defaced. You can soften such erstwhile defects, if you are *utterly* conscienceless, by dragging in a reference to Edmund Malone (1741-1812) who inlaid *all* the leaves of his presumably perfect Shakespeare Quartos because he liked them that way—the jackass.

MELLOWED: An adjective usually applied to whiskey and the drinkers thereof. When used to describe a green leather spine that has turned brown, as it inevitably does, "mellowed" has a warm cozy sound denied the more usual "faded" which connotes age without serenity. When cataloguing a sun-burnt set of classics always say "*uniformly* mellowed." Just one different shade of color spoils a dress parade.

OFFSETS: If these are very strong and you are brave enough, you may say "plates in two states."

OOZE: There is no such word in bibliographical language, but it aptly describes those grey-green, sticky bindings so often found on the privately printed memoirs of illiterate nonagenarians. While "bound in full frog" is tempting, "ooze" suggests the dank corners of village ponds and is an excellent compromise.

PLATES BEFORE LETTERS: For some reason these are considered *most* desirable. They were popular, especially among the French, around the turn of the century (*fin de siècle*, if you want to be fancy). To the uninitiated these uncaptioned plates look as if the printer just plain forgot. Or couldn't be bothered. After all, French pictures often need no explanation, except perhaps to a small child of four or five. ("Mama, what *is* that swan doing...?")

Illustrations trimmed to the plate mark should not be described as "before letters."

PROVENANCE: It is always pleasant (and often profitable) to catalogue the "Devonshire-Bridgewater-Hoe-Huntington" copy, but what if your book contains the bookplate of an unknown—say that of *Sir Rufus Bluebottle, Bluster Hall, Glos.*? You should simply state: "The Bluebottle copy." Some people may look at you a little queerly, but you'd be surprised how it works.

RUBBED: A nasty word when applied to miniatures in illuminated manuscripts and one that should always be qualified by "slightly." If all gold and paint have vanished, you may say "shows evidence of great devotional love by former owner."

SCOTCH TAPE: As an enemy of books this is the Twentieth Century's answer to that medieval scourge, the book worm. Users thereof should be put to the sword and then wrapped for burial in this execrable material.

SOPHISTICATED COPY: A phrase not much employed these days. A pity, for it is redolent of hauteur and suggests a volume from "The Library of a Nobleman." Actually, it means a book that has been mucked about and made up from other copies. It is generally agreed that a sophisticated copy should contain at least one leaf of the original edition.

STUBS: These are the things you break the backs of nice 18th century bindings looking for and hoping not to find.

TENDER: Apply to hinges when they are broken. A rather charming adjective and preferable to "weak."

UNCANCELLED LEAF: To come upon a page with uncorrected text (an inverted letter or dropped "e") is like finding gold in the streets. Describe your item as possessing "S₁ in original uncorrected state. It was found necessary to cancel this leaf immediately the offending error was discovered and before the book got into general circulation." Never disclose the error. Let the customer imagine what he will; he'll probably confuse "offending" with "offensive."

UNPRESSED COPY: If your 16th century quarto is water-soaked and the leaves therein resemble the waves of the ocean, it is hardly cricket to call them "unpressed."

VOL. I [ALL PUBLISHED?]: You should at least *look* for Vol. II.

WASHED: Cleanliness may be next to godliness, but to the book-collecting fraternity the washing of books is the work of Beelzebub himself. Should the leaves of your book resemble "a rain-washed bone" (c.f. Kipling), and if of the type thereon you can only say with Childe Harold "'tis gone and all is gray"—there's not a damn thing you can do but label the book "clean" and hope that all your customers are blind.

WOODCUT BORDERS: When in any 16th century book (preferably French) these are always by Geoffrey Tory.

WORKING COPY: Any book which is foxed, loose, wrenched, dunched, stained, trimmed, wormed, worn, torn—all in one glorious mess—may be thus termed. You may prefer to use the phrase "scholar's copy," in which case the text must be present.

YAPP: A type of limp binding, often in white velum, the foredge of which over-yapps—sorry—laps the contents. Named after a 19th century bookseller who should have known better. These bindings usually house "dainty" editions of Tennyson's "Idylls" and similar volumes of innocuities suitable for presentation to adolescents.

1000 Copies

Designed by GRAHAM MACKINTOSH

Printed in Santa Barbara by MACKINTOSH & YOUNG

July 1977