

A SCIENTIFIC CATALOGUE

Bernard Quaritch's General Catalogue. Part II. Natural History and Science. Part III. Periodicals, Journals, and Transactions. (London: 1881-83.)

IN few instances that a political economist could hold up as an example is the function of the merchant in the processes of supply and demand so clearly and simply displayed as in that of Mr. Bernard Quaritch, the wealthy merchant in the book trade. He is especially a merchantman seeking goodly pearls, whose great qualification must be that he knows the exact demand for, and the exact scarcity of, what is to be bought and sold. His catalogue does not aim at completeness as did the one which we noticed lately. Scarcely more than one-tenth of the titles carefully entered in Mr. Friedländer's lists are to be found here; but these make a collection, and a very large one, of books brought together by "natural" selection with the same good results in this case of intelligent working, as in the more automatic world around us. Many eminent men in various branches of science have first selected books bearing upon their own subjects, and then, on the dispersion of such libraries, Mr. Quaritch selects those works which have a higher value through their own superior merit, or the often doubtful though highly-prized recommendation of rarity. Accordingly Mr. Quaritch's catalogue is considerably like the sum total of British legislation. Each item of it was the supply of an existing want according to the best light of the time of its production. While circumstances, however, have changed and fresh laws have been devised to meet the changed circumstances, old laws have remained upon the statute book, and the existing code contains at the same time both inconsistent repetitions and grave deficiencies, and lacks both symmetry and completeness. While the catalogue of Mr. Friedländer shows the German love of both these good qualities and the scientific tastes of the compiler, that of Mr. Quaritch does not profess to be complete in any sense; it is a list of an immense stock of books brought together, as their former possessors ceased to require them, by a shrewd man of business who knew their market value. Hence in examining these bound up volumes which contain the many rich prizes of scientific literature constituting Part II. and Part III. of a new "General Catalogue," one is not surprised to find that a book like Agassiz's "Nomenclator Zoologicus" is to be found in four different places in one of them; that five copies of Owen's "Odontology" are offered, and a variety of copies of many others.

In Friedländer's catalogue we had to complain of too much classifying; not because classification is not of extreme value as a ready guide to the contents of a catalogue or library, but because many books refuse to fall under one head only, however discreet may be the arrangement. Mr. Bernard Quaritch's catalogue is just the reverse. In these volumes there is no attempt at either alphabetical or subject-divisions of the whole collection; different divisions are lists of books purchased at particular sales. A concise index makes up perhaps in the best way for this utter confusion of subjects. The table of contents, to which one would look first in trying to understand such a catalogue, is not printed in a way to clearly express the arrangement of those titles which

are classified in subjects. A list of thirteen natural history headings follows "Egypt and North Africa" in exactly the same way as a nearly similar list of fourteen follows "The British Isles," but the former has nothing to do with Egypt as the latter had to do with the British Isles.

But Mr. Quaritch is the great connoisseur in a different class of books from the works which draw our attention in his catalogue. This class it would hardly come within our province to notice, were it not for the evidence given here, on the one hand, that costly books are purchased now as much as of old by the "patron" of literature, and on the other, that scientific works of original value and present scarcity are bought up by mere book collectors or bibliolaters, who would in many cases fret while one of their precious volumes was being turned over for consultation, lest it should end in a crack in its beautiful binding! Mr. Quaritch labours abundantly, and not without love, we think, for these purchasers. Here are a few of the feminine pomps and vanities with which he tickles the ears of bibliomaniacs:—"Grolier binding," "variegated leathers," "gold scroll tooling," "purple morocco super extra," "veau fauve," "veau marbré," "arms and cypher of ———," "vellum fly-leaves," "large paper," "tall copy," "magnificent specimen of bibliopegistic skill." Here is a titbit:—"First Aldine edition, very large, fine copy, in blue morocco, gold tooling, silk lining, vellum fly-leaves, gilt gaufré edges, by Bozerian."

A distinguishing feature in Mr. Quaritch's catalogues are the valuable notes appended to nearly all the most important of the works he offers. These notes as to the scarcity, completeness, market value, and often the history of the book testify to both the extent of his business and the minute accuracy of his knowledge of it. They are a mine of valuable information to any one whose business is in books, either commercially or as a librarian intrusted with the care and also the completion of important collections. In few cases will a book only professing to be a stock-list itself command a price in the market. Mr. Quaritch's catalogues command a high price, and the new edition of his general one, of which seven parts are now out, and which will probably not be completed for another year, if it should be the last which our veteran publishes, will doubtless remain for some time to come a standard work upon literature.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

[The Editor does not hold himself responsible for opinions expressed by his correspondents. Neither can he undertake to return, or to correspond with the writers of, rejected manuscripts. No notice is taken of anonymous communications.]

[The Editor urgently requests correspondents to keep their letters as short as possible. The pressure on his space is so great that it is impossible otherwise to insure the appearance even of communications containing interesting and novel facts.]

Elevation and Subsidence

FOR several months past articles and letters have appeared in NATURE on the subject of subsidence and elevation of the earth's crust by addition and removal of weight. In this connection also much has been said in regard to the history of the idea. I wish therefore to draw attention to the fact that in 1859 I read a paper before the American Association for the Advancement of Science on the subject of the "Formation of Continents