

PHYSICS BOOKS OF HISTORICAL INTEREST IN THE COLLEGES OF ILLINOIS

BY

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The writer of this paper has been prompted to his theme by two experiences which came to his attention and by an experience of his own, all having to do with the resources of small college libraries in the line of old books. The personal experience was to find in the dead storage of the library of the college of his own employ, an old leather bound volume bearing on its back the simple title, "Newton's Chronolog." This book was stacked among other old theological books, and had been overlooked by many persons of theological interests who apparently did not stop to think that the writer of this volume might have been of far greater fame in other fields. Persons of scientific bent who had passed by this simple title probably did not consider that a writer of a book on theological matters could actually be the great "Sir Isaac" himself. The book was published in Dublin in 1728. How it came into our possession is a mystery except that it doubtless was in some one or other of the numerous private collections which have been presented to the college throughout the years of its history. The book is now in careful keeping and not classified among our resources in theology but a prized possession of our department of physics.

The ordinary college seems to be in a position almost unique for the collection of old books. The heirlooms from many a book lover fall into the hands of descendants who have other tastes. What more kindly disposition could be made of the books than to give them to the college which has already advertised the limitations of its library and its needs for help?

It seemed to be a worth while experiment to choose a field—in this case physics—and tabulate the resources of the various colleges of Illinois as to books of historical interest. The three larger universities of the State were not included since their resources would naturally be large and it was expected that they might obscure the main purpose of the project; namely, to organize resources not commonly recognized. To all the other institutions giving college degrees, a letter was written explaining the project and requesting them to send lists of their books in physics published previous to 1883 and written in English.

The list finally compiled includes 121 titles and represents the replies of sixteen colleges. Among the colleges which failed to respond, the larger institutions were most numerous, probably due to the larger amount of labor required to examine their more extensive collections. It is hoped that this report may serve to stimulate interest that will later lead to more extensive organization of this kind not only in physics but in other fields.

NOTE.—Mimeographed copies of the book list may be obtained gratis from the author.