



041

6

Books And Non-Books

Quite a large number of the world's publications consists of what some critics categorise as non-books. The proportion is larger in the Third World than in the West but there is no country which succeeded in avoiding the publication of non-books altogether.

What, one may reasonably ask, is a non-book? How should one recognise it? And are all non-books useless, a waste of paper and ink and of course money?

The questions are not easy to answer. There is no agreed definition which all would accept. It is also possible that many are unfamiliar with the term non-book and imagine that anything in print within covers, hard or soft, qualifies to be treasured as a valuable contribution to civilization.

But the fact is that the ready accessibility of printing facilities has made it possible for anybody who has money or patronage to get together some material, either their own writings or trash from newspapers, charts, quotations and released as books, sometimes with a preface or introduction, sometimes, without any. Having done so, the 'author' pats himself on the back as a writer with a right to be honoured, entitled to all those privileges which go with authorship.

Most of us, have seen what we would call 'occasionalia' collected from dailies and weeklies and served up by their proud authors as books which in their judgement carry the same weight as Thomas Aquinas' Summa Theologica or Bradleys' Appearance and Reality or Russell's History of Western Philosophy, or, to give some examples from the East, Abul Fazl's Akbar Nama or Ghulam Hussain Selim's Riyaz-us-Salatin.

Editors of newspapers have the unenviable privilege of receiving such publications for review. If they decline to notice them they are liable to be criticised and pilloried.