

MESSAGE FROM THE PRIME MINISTER

10 Downing Street

Whitehall

14th November, 1957

I am glad to be able to accept your Secretary's kind invitation and to send a message to the Society for the first issue of 'The Indexer'.

I can scarcely conceal from you the fact that I am at present somewhat occupied with other matters, so that I cannot say all that comes into my mind and memory on the subject of indexing. I can, however, claim a keen interest in it, both as a former publisher and as a politician who not only provides material for the index to 'Hansard', but finds much of his relaxation in reading the lives and letters of bygone Parliamentarians, and therefore often has reason to be grateful for an indexer's skill and patience.

In summoning up remembrance of things past, I can recall indexes in great variety, from the humdrum but invaluable list of names and pages, to those so majestic that they occupied a whole volume to themselves - as in Sir James Frazer's edition of Ovid's 'Fasti', Sir Arthur Evan's 'Palace of Minos', and the Greville Memoirs. I know, too, how often an author, whether he knew it or not, was indebted to an indexer for pointing out errors, discrepancies, or repetitions that had otherwise escaped detection in the proofs.

Perhaps I may be forgiven if I go back some forty years to another Macmillan book, a volume of 'Literary Recreations' by that distinguished journalist Sir Edward Cook. It contained an admirable article on 'The Art of Indexing', which combined sound advice with good entertainment. It reminded me, for example, of Samuel Butler's mischievous entries in his own indexes, such as:

Genius, Mr. Allen says I am a, 388.

There were other instances that now have for me a more personal touch. Ruskin, it appears, had written:

'If you have to obey the whip as a bad hound, because you have no nose, like the members of the present House of Commons, it is a very humble form of service indeed.'

What an indexer made of this passage was:

House of Commons, its members have no noses, 28.

I have also to admit, with all proper regret, that Sir Edward - a stout Liberal - mentioned the reported instructions given by Macaulay:

'Let no damned Tory index my "History".'

But I must resist the temptation to go on quoting, and must content myself with saying that the Society of Indexers seems likely to have the opportunity of doing valuable work in upholding the standard of indexing and in bringing its practitioners into touch with those who require their services. I wish the Society and its members prosperity and success in their undertakings.

Herbert Morrison