INDEXING IN THE U.S.A.

A member living in the U.S.A. writes in a letter to the Chairman . . .

. . . My indexing experiences so far have been few and not too happy. The first one offered to me was a huge history of the U.S.A. with 52 pages of index, double columns—a vast undertaking and they wanted it done in three weeks! The sheer mechanical part—especially the typing—would be hard to do in that time leave alone any brain-work! So I had to decline it. Then another publisher called up three days before Christmas and wanted a very complicated index on a book about Art with 'figures' and 'plates' and very stringent orders about the exact set-up—all to be done in ten days!! This was also impossible (for me, anyway) so I took one look at the proof-sheets and returned it! They very kindly offered me another soon after, which I have just completed. I don't know if they are satisfied or not—I am waiting to hear.

The difficulty for me is that they expect the indexer to do a lot of work which in London was left to the publishers and printers. They want thirty units to a line and so many lines to a page and so many spaces between the entry and the page-number and so many if the entry runs to two lines . . . and so on, and so on. I find this business of counting the 'units' per line very tedious and time-consuming, especially when I have done it several hundred times! However, I love the work, and I will probably get adjusted to their ways very soon. But I will never be able to cope with these 'rush jobs'. With this last one, they said I would have a week from the day I got the last batch of proofs. This was fine—but they suddenly rang up to say I could only have three days!! They needed the work in a hurry for the press! We have no society of indexers here—it's time we had one.

When I was first approached I tried everywhere to get a handbook of printers' terms in the U.S.A. because I had so many phrases slung at me and technical 'jargon' which I had never come across before. But not even in the big Harvard Bookshop could I find anything of this kind. However, 'nil desperandum'—I am going to try a newspaper publisher in one of the local small towns . . .

By the way, that reminds me that, had we stayed in London, I had planned to work for the recognition of indexers by publishers—I think it is well over time that this should be done, and I can see no great problems in doing so or grounds for objections. Could something like this be launched? I refer, of course (in case I have been a little ambiguous) to the name of the indexer being printed just as the name of the publisher and the printer is given.

[That the compiler of any substantial index should receive credit by name (in the same way as an illustrator or translator) is strongly recommended by both the American and the British Standards of Indexing. Publishers in this country are now on the whole looking favourably on this very reasonable practice.—G.N.K.]

THE FIFTH TRAINING COURSE

The Society's Fifth Training Course in Indexing was held, as were the last three of its immediate predecessors, at the North-Western Polytechnic in Kentish Town, London, N.W.5. The most cordial thanks of the Society are due to the authorities of the School of Librarianship at the Polytechnic, and in particular to Mr. P. N. New, F.L.A., for their much appreciated and very effective co-operation.
On this occasion the innovation was tried of having all eleven lectures concentrated in three-and-a-half days of the same week (January 25th-28th) in place of the old method of one evening a week for eleven successive weeks. The result was so successful that it is doubtful if resort will ever be had again to the old method. Thirty-five applicants were accepted for the complete Course and a maximum of five others for any one individual lecture. A number of applications had to be rejected after the maximum for the Course had been reached. It was noticeable that most of the students remained with the Course throughout; the tailing-off which always takes place when a course is stretched over the weeks did not occur.

Of the 35 who enrolled for the full course, 22 represented their employers as follows: academic libraries 3, commercial firms 3, government departments or libraries 6, industrial firms and research associations 8, public libraries 2.

EXTRACTS AND COMMENTS

'Their inclusion [25 colour photographs] scarcely compensates for the lack of an index. Without it the usefulness of a book of this kind is reduced by quite one half. Printed on the Continent and priced at two guineas, this production surely could have, should have, afforded an index.'—The West India Committee Chronicle, December, 1965, reviewing Ian Fleming introduces Jamaica, edited by Morris Cargill (André Deutsch).

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'Possessing an American copy of A thousand days: John F. Kennedy in the White House by Arthur M. Schlesinger Jr., I have the advantage of other reviewers whose English copy (Deutsch) has no index, although I gather an index will be supplied to the general public.

'My index has enabled me quickly to look up the references to Dean Rusk which caused such dismay in America.'—Woodrow Wyatt, M.P., in the Evening Standard, November 25, 1965.

But whatever can have caused a work of this description (871 pages in the smaller-type English edition without the index) to appear in this country in this incomplete fashion?

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'Short as Miss Handover's book is, it is so full of meat that it should have had an index.'—The Times Literary Supplement, February 10, 1966, reviewing A history of the London Gazette, 1665-1965, by P. M. Handover (H.M.S.O., Is. 6d.).

The London Gazette itself is, of course, admirably indexed by Mrs. Grace Holmes, a member of the Society of Indexers, whose tender was accepted in 1962. An exceedingly interesting article on how she sets about her task was published in The Indexer, Vol. IV, No. 1 (Spring, 1964), pages 13-6.

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'This is definitely a book to be read by all who have the welfare of British Industry at heart. But please, Dr. Thomas, give us an index next time.'—F. Nixon reviewing The control of quality by L. F. Thomas in The Manager, December, 1965.