BIAS IN INDEXING

The following extract is from Asquith by Roy Jenkins (Collins), 1964:

What were the merits of the argument? Did Asquith eagerly seize upon the false accusations of a sour and neurotic general (as Lloyd George insisted on regarding Maurice) or did the Prime Minister tear up the truth in order to discomfort his critics and gain a spurious House of Commons victory? Lloyd George, in his speech, rested upon two sets of alternative defences.

The index entry for Maurice in Lloyd George’s War Memoirs is a remarkable example of importing invective into a section of a book which is normally neutral:

“Maurice, Sir Frederick... comfortably placed as any politician, 1675; subservient and unbalanced, 1685;... his astonishing arithmetical calculations, 1763-4; the instrument by which the Government was to be thrown out, 1778;... his astonishing volte face of 22/4/18, 1780-1... intrigues against the Government, his mind being apparently unhinged, 1784; false allegations against Lloyd George and Bonar Law published by, 1784-6; the tool of astuter men, 1786... his double-dealing denounced by Lloyd George, 1787-8... his grave breach of discipline condoned by Asquith, 1791; dismissed, 1791.”

INDEXING MASTERPIECES—1

DR. POWELL’S INDEX TO BOSWELL’S

Life of Johnson

E. S. de Beer

George Birkbeck Hill’s edition of Boswell’s Life of Johnson was published by the Clarendon Press in 1887. It is in six volumes. The first four contain the Life; the fifth contains Boswell’s Journal of a tour to the Hebrides; and the sixth the index and some other matter. Boswell’s share consists of the texts of the Life and the Journal, including everything (notably letters from Johnson and excerpts from his journal) that he had printed in his own editions of the two books, and some foot-notes. All the remaining notes, and the appendixes, no matter what their source, are editorial accretions.

In course of time Hill’s edition went out of print and much fresh information accumulated. It was therefore decided to publish a revision of it, retaining his pagination and many of his notes and appendixes, and gaining additional space for new and expanded notes and appendixes by altering the lay-out of the pages and by increasing the number of pages in each volume. The revision was carried out by Dr. L. F. Powell. Vols. i-iv appeared in 1934, vols. v and vi in 1950. A second edition of vols. v and vi, again Dr. Powell’s work, appeared in 1964; he is now revising vols. i-iv.

Hill’s index was a remarkable achievement in its day and, despite some roughnesses and deformities, ranks among the great indexes. But it has been completely transcended. Dr. Powell’s, as he writes in the preface to his first edition, is based upon Dr. Hill’s general plan, but the additions, due chiefly but not entirely to the new material given in the notes and appendixes, are so numerous, the rearrangement so great, and the new features so important that it may be described, without exaggeration, as a new work.1 His second edition is enlarged and improved.