AN AMATEUR'S INDEX

The usefulness of a book is often mimised by an inefficient index.

*The English village community and the enclosure movements* by W. E. Tate, author of *The parish chest* (Gollancz, 1967, 42s.), deserves a much better index than it has been given. On the dust-jacket is the statement that it has a 'very full index'. The book has 205 pages, with a 13-page index amounting to six or seven per cent of the text (measuring by lines) which should provide a full index for a work of this type. However, investigation shows that of 650 entries in the index very nearly one-third are 'see' entries without page numbers, so that the functional size of the index is only four or four and a half per cent—on the short side.

The index is described in a long preamble as 'rather more than a mere alphabetical table—giving names of persons, places, and books, etc. (but rarely topics or subjects) mentioned. It is intended on occasion to supplement the text as well as serve as a guide to it.' The supplementary parts of the index are useful; they consist chiefly of dates of birth and death for the (non-modern) persons included, or dates of reign for monarchs, and lists—under each county name—of places in that county to be found in the index. Where there are two references to a subject on one page, this is indicated by bis. Besides the index, there are a glossary and a table of statutes cited.

The very numerous 'see' entries derive from several sources. Nearly three-quarters of them are references from titles of books to their authors. Other categories are: references from names of translators of books to authors; from names of co-authors to first-named authors; from titles of peers to family names; from pseudonyms to real names. In the large majority of 'see' entries, only one page number is involved, and space would always have been saved by omitting the cross-references and putting the page number or numbers in both places. It is also doubtful whether it was necessary to index both titles of books and names of authors, especially for such entries as 'Tempest, see Shakespeare', and 'Penguin Island, see France, Anatole'; If the titles of anonymous books only had been entered, a really considerable amount of space would have been saved—three pages out of thirteen. This could have been devoted to entries for the topics of interest in the book, other than proper names, which would have much increased the value of the index. These topics are much too numerous to be located, as is hopefully suggested, from the table of contents and lists of plates and figures.

But given this extensive system of cross-references, it has not been carried through successfully on its own lines.

There are five examples of what Mr. G. V. Carey, in the index of his pamphlet *Making an index*, has memorably named Wild Goose Chases. On referring from title of book to author, as directed, one is then redirected to the book:

- *Justice of the peace*, 1755 and edns, see *Burn*
- *Burn*, Richard, see *Justice of the peace*
- *Analytical tables of private statutes* 1727-1812, 1813 see *Bramwell*
- *Bramwell*, George, see *Analytical tables of private statutes*

and others of the same kind.

Other chases may be said to give one a run for one's money:

- *Five Hundred Pointes . . .* (Tusser), 1571 see *Hundredth good pointes*
- *Hundredth good Pointes of Husbandrie*, 1557 and edns, see *Tusser*
- *Tusser*, Thomas, ?1524-80, 71, 157, 60, 162
- *Lancashire*, 47. See also *Whalley*
- *Whalley*, see *Whitaker*
The chase for yet other references has to be called off, unrewarded:

**Common and Common Fields, 1887, see Scrutton**

Scrutton, T. E., later L.C.J., and I. B. Scrutton [no page number]

**Economic History of England, var. edns., see Lipson.**

Lipson, E., Economic History of England, var. edns. [no page number].

**Index of Acts Local and Personal, 1801-1947 (1949) [no page number]**

Doulton, F., M.P. for Lambeth 1862-8 [no page number]

Some little puzzles are set for the index-user. One is told, under the names of books, to 'see Marshall', 'see Moore', 'see Young', only to find two Marshalls, two Moores, and two Youngs. As the names of books are usually not repeated in the entries for authors, one can only select the right one of the pair by looking up page references. Again, under 'Blandford, M. of', one is told to see Spencer (Churchill), and under 'Norreys, Lord', to see Bertie. There are six Spencers and three Berties, but this time matters are simpler, for all the references are to p. 210 where one finds a reference to Blandford and Norreys as the courtesy titles of the heirs of the Dukes of Marlborough and the Earls of Abingdon.

Some entries are in curious form:

**Annales of England (originally Chronicles . . . ) 1580 and edns, see Anon. (Stow)**

Anon., see Annales of England, 1580, 74 [no mention of Stow]

(in Blockley), Glos., see Middle Ditchford Middle Ditchford in Blockley, Glos., 206-7

Bingley, Yorks., W. (?See also) Bingley, Riddlesden Riddlesden (in Bingley etc.), Yorks., W., 211

The entry 'Poems, various', has the unexpectedly compact ending: 'see Clare'.

Some entries contain a superfluity of information, e.g.:

University of Birmingham Hist. Journ., Ix, 2, 144–62, 1943-4, see Martin

In consistencies can be found in most indexes, and are not important here. Occasionally both title of book and author are given page numbers, instead of author only, and occasionally the name of a book is repeated under that of the author. The counties are given their names in full, except for 'Derbys' (no full stop), and 'Yorks., E.', 'Yorks., N.', and 'Yorks., W.' The aim apparently was to include all books mentioned, but a few have escaped, e.g. Rothamsted Library Catalogue, mentioned under the compiler, and the two books by Tawney.

The alphabetization is at fault in at least 11 places. Most of these are simple errors, but one of them seems to be due to taking the words of and on the into account, although in indexing it is usual to consider only the main words:

History of Great Rebellion . . .
History of Henry VII . . .
History of Kings of England . . .
History of Leicestershire . . .
History on the Ground . . .

If on the is to be taken into account in the last entry, then surely the should have been inserted into the first and third, which would have affected their positions.

In the entry for Tusser, quoted above, the page numbers run: 71, 157, 60, 160; 60 is an intrusion, as there is no mention of Tusser on that page. The printer has omitted to indent the sub-headings at the top of column 2, p. 218.

In keeping with the lack of professionalism about the index are some rather engaging asides:

Bacon, Sir Francis (not 'Lord B.') . . . 66, 73

Coke, Sir Edward (not 'Lord Coke') . . . 124
Cooke, John (not of course the regicide but a contemporary) [no page number]
Young, Arthur, fl. 1808, not the famous Arthur (above), but a contemporary of the same name, 178

In all the examples given, the entries are exactly as in the index to the book except where dots show omissions. M.D.A.

VIZ

Latin is in the dog house these days. There was a time when an indexer could indulge himself in a bit of Latin and not fail to be understood. He used to be able to *ib* to his heart's content, and *et seq* gave him a much more comfortable sense of finality than he could ever derive from the expletive *ff*. And when things became too much for him he could always *bis* and *ter*. No one would dare to do these things today.

Nevertheless I would like to put in a good word for *viz*. In the first place it has outlived its origin. No antique Roman would recognize *videlicet* in the three-letter English equivalent. It may therefore escape the wrath of those comprehensive reformers who would rid our prose of every Latin tag.

In what way can *viz* become a useful tool in the workshop of the indexer? Let us suppose that dotted about in the works of some great and eminently indexable, rambling and discursive writer there are a number of pronouncements on some one subject on which the author may well be consulted. It may be that the contents list, the titles and the chapter heads do not lead the reader to the principal references to the subject. They come together only under the hand of the indexer; some may be of more importance relatively than others, but all require identification; none is insignificant.

The indexer's zeal in analysing and identifying the various aspects of the author's treatment of the subject may conceal by its very care and complexity the relative values of the references. One way to obviate this is to put at the beginning of the article against the main subject head a miniature essay explaining the author's treatment of the subject and drawing attention to the highlights. The impatient reader may, however, skip this in his hurry to get on and find his own way through the column or so of page numbers and their closely printed explanations.

The reader may have to hack his way through the sub-indexing thicket, and he finds the brambles and the thorns, the fruit and the foliage, all neatly docketed and arranged in alphabetical order. He picks out some half-dozen references to the subject, which he hopes are what he wants, and when he looks each one up in the text it is as likely as not that he finds each leads him to the same half-dozen pages. He may appreciate that these few pages do not provide a connected treatment of the subject, but he will wish nevertheless that the indexer had directed his attention to them at one go. He will not thank the indexer for having separately identified each mention of the subject by means of a succinct and qualifying phrase. The indexer alphabetizes these references, and three or four of them in as many consecutive pages may find themselves widely separated in the article on the subject in the index. This is where *viz* may help the indexer and the reader.

The indexer can direct the reader's attention to the pages in question by bringing them together, thus, 90-5, but even if he dares to add *passim* his meticulous conscience will not be satisfied by asking the reader to read six pages to find six references. He must never assume that the reader has time to read; so he puts *viz* after the page numbers, and *viz* opens the way for his identifying remarks on each mention of the subject on pages 90, 91, 92, 93, 94 and 95. The indexer is satisfied he has done his job, and the reader—if after all he doesn't want to read what the indexer has said—can always read the six pages of text instead. The little word *viz* has given satisfaction all round.

J.C.T.