SKIMS, ANCIENT AND MODERN
FROM AN AUTOBIOGRAPHY HITHERTO—AND DOUBTLESS PERMANENTLY—UNPUBLISHED

G. V. CAREY

It is only in response to a signal to his Editorial Board from an Editor momentarily threatened with a shortage of ‘copy’ that I have, diffidently, submitted these disjointed extracts.

[1913] . . . When I first arrived [at the C.U.P. on appointment as junior Assistant Secretary] the Long Vacation was nearly at its deadest, the Press was very quiet, and my only colleague [on the publishing side] was my chief, Waller. He performed my first introductions to officials of the printing side, notably the almost legendary Alfred Mason, who was then approaching the end of his sixty-five years’ service at the Press. Short and compact, with a trim white beard and clean-shaven upper lip, and with a brusqueness of manner that could not quite conceal innate kindness of heart, he presided over the counting-house with an imperiousness calculated to keep everyone in his place, from the Vice-Chancellor downwards. (It was characteristic that from the outset he addressed me, then nearly twenty-seven and M.A., as ‘Young man’—one of his earliest remarks to me was, ‘Young man, you have a lot to learn.’) His son Norman, who had already reached a position of some responsibility in the Press, acted with only a little less assurance than his father and spoke even more staccato.

Waller’s attitude to me was always kind and considerate, if perhaps a little off-hand in initiating me into my duties, the first of which was a task of copy-preparation that looked enough to keep me quiet for a very long time. The towering pile of MS. into which I was to delve was a brand-new dictionary of Classical Antiquities compiled by a learned member of the British Museum staff, my job being to check, not of course his scholarship, but possible incongruities or inconsistencies—of nomenclature, abbreviation, cross-reference, and suchlike. There were in fact a good many of these, and also a few points of more substance on which I had some correspondence with the compiler. But the work as a whole, which promised to be a most valuable publication, was ultimately wrecked from a cause that had never occurred to me as possible. The compiler, apparently in all innocence, had repeated here and there, without permission or acknowledgment, phrases and even whole sentences from Smith’s Classical Dictionary, whose publisher, as soon as the Cambridge book was issued, complained to the Syndics of infringement of copyright; with the result that the latter withdrew and destroyed all unsold copies of this costly publication, and paid him a considerable sum in addition. The news of this débâcle, which did not occur until 1916, leaked through to me when I was otherwise engaged, but even amidst the horrors of war it was a shock, to be softened only on my learning eventually that, in the Syndics’ view, I could not reasonably have been expected to detect this particular transgression.

Thus my first assignment was ill-fated; yet to me personally it was of real benefit
as being my first lesson—and a very arduous one—in a task that, with more and more practice, has become more and more congenial and been pursued with more and more confidence. All my life I have been accused of diffidence and self-depreciation, so let me say here and now that, if there is nothing else that I have done or can do really well (and I honestly don’t believe there is), I know that I am some good at editing—in which term I include proof-correction as well as copy-preparation. (End of trumpet solo.)

I will not attempt to catalogue the jobs of my first year at the Cambridge Press—even if I wanted to, they have mostly faded from memory. But I do remember the first one that earned me a mention in a book’s preface. One of my duties was to keep an eye, during its progress through the press, on a new edition of the Agricola of Tacitus in the Pitt Press Series so well-known to schoolboys; and I owed my coup really to Lendrum. I still recollected his very illuminating and original interpretation of one particular Latin expression used by Tacitus, so I wrote to the editor, tentatively suggesting this unorthodox rendering. He accepted it with delight; and in due course, with a twinge of guilt, I found myself thanked in the preface for (I think) ‘valuable and scholarly suggestions’—it hadn’t, of course, been quite my only one.

I shall mention one other assignment of this period, simply because it too was to have future reverberations. Dr. A. C. Pearson, but lately elected to the Regius Professorship of Greek, was preparing an edition of Sophocles’ Fragments in three volumes, in continuation of Jebb’s standard edition of the Plays. He proposed further that there should be a new single index to the complete series, i.e. to all the Plays as well as the Fragments, and that the existing index entries of the Play volumes should not simply be embodied as they stood, but should be revised, expanded, and in part re-written. Though I had never indexed anything, Waller suggested that I should tackle this job and I agreed to, on the understanding that most of the work on so vast an undertaking would have to be done out of office hours.

In the end, the task was never finished by me, though I spent many, many hours on it. When I joined the Army in September 1914, the work was taken on by S.C.; then on his joining up, about a year later, Dr. Pearson himself took over and completed it. But that was, for me, the start of another ‘side-line’ that I was destined to pursue in later years with some assiduity, for I must by now have compiled at least fifty indexes. However, in this case, although in 1962 the still youthful Society of Indexers did me the honour of electing me its first president, I moderate my trumpet to an mf note: I think that I am fairly good at indexing.

By October 1913 I was settling down agreeably with my colleagues within the Press, and was also becoming acquainted with the Syndics, whose fortnightly meetings started from the beginning of term. It was of course an enormous help to be already on such friendly terms with the chairman and vice-chairman, the Provost of King’s and the Master of Caius, but there were others too who gave a cordial welcome to the latest-joined recruit. I recall the kindness and hospitality, in particular, of Dr. (later Sir) Albert Seward, Master of Downing and Professor of Botany; of the Rev. R. St. John Parry, Vice-Master of Trinity; of Dr. W. R. Sorley, Professor of Moral Philosophy; and of that nobly impressive, white-bearded veteran Sir Adolphus Ward, Master of Peterhouse. For his so prompt and warm recognition I owed something to my brother Clive, who, as the singing teacher of his daughter Adelaide (afterwards wife of Dr. E. W. Barnes, Bishop of Birmingham), had come to know him well.

In these congenial circumstances and surroundings over the course of a year I became increasingly absorbed in my work, as it increased in scope and variety. Copy, proofs, ‘prospectuses’ (i.e. leaflets descriptive of individual books, circulated on publication), valuation sheets, revision of the catalogue, correspondence with authors—
these were among the hundred-and-one items to be handled by the publishing apprentice of those far-off days; and in addition any opportunity of acquiring scraps of knowledge of typography and of printing processes was to be eagerly grasped. I found it all vastly interesting and, rightly or wrongly, allowed the vision of a schoolmaster’s vocation to fade almost without regret . . .

[c. 1925] . . . Of my life at Cambridge little need be added to what I have already related [not only above but also from 1919], other than a note on some projects undertaken in my free time. One was the indexing of one of the early volumes of The Cambridge Ancient History, a task which helped to stabilise foundations on which I was to build later . . .

[1945] . . . A few weeks after demobilisation I was once more in search of work and not unnaturally looked towards Heinemanns, since they had begun to use me as an ‘outside’ proof-reader in 1938-9. C. S. Evans had died during the war and one of the other directors, B. F. Oliver, was now in charge of the firm’s printing-house at Kingswood, the Windmill Press. His reply to my inquiry was that paper-rationing had so much reduced their output that at present they had nothing that need go outside, but that, should the position alter, he would bear me in mind. I knew that formula all too well; I shall hear no more from Heinemanns, I thought. But I was wrong. For the kindly Oliver, to ‘bear in mind’ meant exactly what it said, and towards the end of my Robertsbridge [sanatorium] exile there arrived, without any reminder on my part and with an intimation that there would probably be more to follow, a book to be ‘read for press’.

Never was there a truer forecast. The stream that then began to trickle became a river that flowed steadily for fifteen years, during most of which I was averaging, of Heinemann books alone, four or five a month, largely fiction, not untainted by an occasional unsavoury specimen of the ultramodern seductio ad absurdum vogue. But it was mostly good stuff: Maugham, Priestley, Anthony Powell, Graham Greene, Pamela Frankau, Olivia Manning, Elleston Trevor; a little of Richard Church, John Steinbeck, Richard Aldington, Morris West; a lot of Georgette Heyer and Nevil Shute.

The last name I inevitably associate with a snowy morning (a Tuesday, I think) in January 1960. I was still reading in my Times, over breakfast, the unexpected and regrettable news of the death of Nevil Shute Norway, when the telephone bell rang: the Windmill Press to speak to me.

W.P.—‘What are conditions like down your way [Midhurst]? Are the roads passable?’

G.V.C.—‘Unpleasantly icy in places, I imagine; but there’s still some traffic on them.’

W.P.—‘I expect we could get a car through, then. How soon could you read, in galley, a Nevil Shute of 320 pages or so?’

G.V.C.—‘In about a week.’

W.P.—‘Not good enough. How about Thursday—if you get it by lunch-time today?’

G.V.C.—‘Give me till Friday.’

W.P. (after a pause)—‘Very well, if you’ll promise to have it ready for us to fetch by car first thing that morning. It’ll start off to you by road within the next few minutes.’

That afternoon, though not much before 4 o’clock, Trustee from the Toolroom arrived, and I finished reading it by the Friday morning—in the small hours, luckily, for just as I came down sleepy-eyed to breakfast, the car for its second solitary, thirty-mile, chauffeur-driven journey (V.I.Proof treatment indeed) drew up at my door. Before all this happened I had of course had no idea that a Nevil Shute work was in the press at the time of his death, nor had my own experience in a more sedate line of publishing taught me the publicity value of issuing it at the first possible moment thereafter. This episode might in fact be entitled, with apologies to a distinguished playwright, ‘Death of a Best-seller’.

Of the more solid reading entrusted to me by the Windmill Press I would mention
first the English editions of the Boswell volumes that were appearing in the U.S.A. under the aegis of the University of Yale: *Boswell's London Diary*, *Boswell on the Grand Tour*, and their successors. As the English pagination did not correspond exactly with the American, in the very full indexes every single page-numeral had to be checked, and most of them altered—a heavy addition to my labours. Then there were, for instance, A. M. Schlesinger junr. on *The Age of Roosevelt*, Eisenhower's *Crusade in Europe*, Weygand’s *Recalled to Service*, Gen. Spears’s *Assignment to Catastrophe* (2 vols.), some John Masefield, autobiographies by Lord Attlee, Lord Brabazon, Lord Maugham, and (especially fascinating) Lord Ismay, two of Roy Jenkins’s earlier books, and a fragment—but what a precious one—of Max Beerbohm. These, as well as non-fiction by, of the authors mentioned earlier, W. S. Maugham, Priestley, Aldington, Church, will give some idea of how rich a fund of pleasure can be linked with duty . . .

Intermingled with proof-reading was a good deal of indexing. In earlier chapters I have alluded to my first steps on that not very well-trodden path, but though I had by then pursued it some way further I felt far from well qualified when in 1951 Brooke Crutchley, the University Printer, invited me to contribute a pamphlet on indexing to a series of *Cambridge Authors’ and Printers’ Guides* on which the Press had just embarked. However, when Stanley Morison added his persuasiveness to Crutchley’s I succumbed, and the resultant *Making an Index* has found more favour than I expected. At any rate, encouraging things about it have been said to me by some experienced and friendly people.

Meanwhile the Windmill Press, when sending to me for proof-reading any book that also needed an index, took to relying on me for the latter as well. Amongst the more interesting of these assignments there come to mind *Arnold Bennett* by Reginald Pound, *Carson* by Montgomery Hyde, *A Book of Trials* by Sir Travers Humphreys, Noël Coward’s *Future Indefinite*, John Marshall’s *Sussex Cricket*; as also Sir Edward Spears’s two volumes and the autobiographies of Lords Attlee, Brabazon, Maugham, and Ismay already mentioned. Robert Henriques’s biography of Sir Robert Waley Cohen, for both proof-reading and indexing (for Secker & Warburg), has been my last undertaking [up to 1966].

All these were comparatively light tasks; more difficult of course, especially for one fully conscious of the limits of his knowledge, are those that relate to more abstract subjects, philosophical, psychological, linguistic, and the like. Of such I mention only two, wherein I have been flattered by my services having been asked for. My old friend and First War comrade, Major J. R. Abbey, preparing a *de luxe* catalogue, in four large volumes, of his matchless collection of 18th-19th-century books, assigned to me the compilation of their fourfold index: of artists and engravers; of authors; of printers, publishers, and book-sellers; of book titles. I greatly treasure these noble products of the Curwen Press, which he generously gave me when they appeared. Again, Mrs. Nora Chadwick took so charitable a view of an index I had done of one of her late husband’s books (whereas I’d thought that owing to my ignorance of its Anglo-Saxon subject I’d made a poor job of it) that she most kindly sought my services for two equally learned works of her own.

I cite this last occurrence not in self-laudation but simply to show how much—given a reasonable stock of common sense—one can get away with in indexing. Anyway I have a guilty feeling of having got away with an awful lot in relation to the Society of Indexers, founded in 1957 by that indomitable Crusader, G. Norman Knight, for only as I write this in 1966 am I on the brink of stepping down from its presidency, to which, after serving on its Council from the start, I was elected four years ago. Though once more, as at Eastbourne College nearly thirty years earlier, feeling the urge to ‘go before being pushed’, I am truly proud of having been the Society’s first President.

Let me not forget, either, that, as well as
the pleasure I have derived from meeting a number of its friendly members, I owe to the Society of Indexers indirectly one debt beyond all repayment. It was towards the end of 1958 that the author of a biography of Lord Haldane inquired of the then Secretary whether the Society could put him in touch with an indexer, and was informed that one happened to live within a mile or two of him; for the aforesaid author, Dudley Sommer by name, lived just outside Midhurst. The outcome of our subsequent meeting was not merely my entrustment with the reading, both in typescript and proof, and the indexing of *Haldane of Clan* (Allen & Unwin)—most congenial of tasks, but the birth of a much treasured friendship, which our wives also have come to share. For me there has been no happier feature of my life at Midhurst.

A few final words about an occupation that most people probably imagine to be mere drudgery. I confess that, for me, there is usually an intermediate stretch of ‘grind’ (sometimes prolonged), but I enjoy the early, and still more the last, stages of an index. It is in the course of that final process of straightening out and tidying up that the indexer begins to feel uplifted by the sense of creation; for it may well be—pathetic though it may seem—that, with limitless aspiration to create, he has realised by now that the utmost he can achieve is an index. *Parturient montes, nascetur ridiculus mus.* But let not the born creative artist scoff. Rather let a silent tear be shed when, all too soon, the indexer is shouldered aside by the computer and his one poor outlet blocked . . .

G. V. Carey, 1969. ©

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**PERSONALIA**

It is good news to learn that our Hon. Corresponding Member for the Far East, Mr. H. D. Talbot, B.Sc., who has been for over seven years in Hong Kong as Lecturer in Geography at the University there, expects to return to this country on leave in May next year and hopes to meet other members then.

In 1962 Mr. Talbot and his wife indexed a translation and commentary on a Chinese Pharmacopoeia of the 16th century that was published by the Hong Kong University Press; this work contained more than seven indexes (no fewer!)—a Chinese index, a Japanese index, a set of indexes for the other Asian languages, a clinical index, a chemical index, an index of botanical synonyms, as well as a General Index.

Mr. Talbot is the author of a short but interesting and informative article: ‘The Chinese are Against Indexes’ on page 123.

*Will our other Hon. Corresponding Members please note that we should much like to hear from them from time to time?*

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**A SEVENTEENTH-CENTURY NOTE ON INDEXERS**

‘Though the idle deserve no crutches (let not a staff be used by them but on them). Pity it is the weary should be denied the benefit thereof, and industrious scholars prohibited the accommodation of an index.’

Thomas Fuller (1608-1661).