EXTRACTS AND COMMENTS

LYNSKEY TRIBUNAL

The following letter was printed in the Daily Telegraph on the 30th May, 1969:

Sir—Peterborough records (May 26) that the findings of the Lynskey Tribunal ran to 50,000 words. Actually the full report (Cmd. 7616, 1949), complete with evidence, etc., ran to over a million words.

But the amazing thing is that this vast foolscap volume was published by His Majesty’s Stationery Office without a general index, so that anyone consulting it is quite unable to find readily any particular item he may be seeking.

NORMAN KNIGHT.

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A POISONOUS CROSS-REFERENCE

I recently encountered a pocket diary that devoted two pages to an alphabetically arranged list of ‘Poisons and their Antidotes’. But space does not seem to have permitted the printing of the complete list, making it essential that the diary’s owner shall be careful to get himself poisoned by some substance beginning with a letter from the first half of the alphabet. But he must not choose ‘Hydrochloric Acid’, because that is followed by: ‘see Spirits of Salts’!

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MORE COMPUTER BLUNDERS

The R.A.F. possesses one or more computers. Recently it or one of them discharged an airman on the grounds of pregnancy!

The Swedish equivalent of our G.P.O. also has a computer. This not so long ago returned to the sender a letter correctly addressed to ‘H.M. the King of Sweden, The Royal Palace, Stockholm’, but with a wrongly ascribed district number. It came back marked: ‘Addressee unknown!’ This was because, unable to trace the addressee according to the code number indicated, the machine had totally rejected the letter.

A third ludicrous blunder, illustrated in the Daily Telegraph of April 21, concerns a computer-issued certificate of proficiency in animal husbandry, which is signed by the Chairman and the Director-general of the City and Guilds of London Institute. The wording runs: ‘The examination included a written paper and a practical/oral test in beef cattle and sheep husbandry and the relevant proficiency tests’. A stuttering computer that itself requires a proficiency test?

It may be asked if an instrument that is capable of such egregious errors can be trusted to compile an index.

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Out of seven book reviews in the April West Indies Chronicle the index (or want of it) is mentioned in no fewer than four. Of Pax Britannica: The Climax of an Empire, by James Morris (Faber & Faber) and The Fall of the British Empire, 1918-1968, by Colin Cross (Hodder & Stoughton) it says that ‘both books are extremely readable but Pax Britannica has by far the better index’.

Caribbeana 1900-1965 (University of Washington Press), we are told, ‘provides a very good author index as well as a territorial index and the book is cross-referenced where necessary’.

The Man from Devil’s Island, by Colin Rickards (Peter Dawnay Ltd.) ‘is deserving of an index, the exclusion of which is regrettable’.

Finally, of The Caribbean in Pictures, by L. O. Evans (Oak Tree Press), ‘it must be regretted that the publishers saw fit to omit a brief index’.

G.N.K.

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‘My only criticism of the book is the index, a very odd production, since it does not list any of Wilde’s works’. So writes Walter Allen in the Daily Telegraph of May 8, in a review of Oscar Wilde, by Philippe Julian (Constable).
Neither of these books has an index', complains Anthony Powell in the Daily Telegraph of March 6. He was reviewing two newly translated Russian autobiographies: Southern Adventure, by Konstantin Paustovsky, translated by Kyril FitzLyon (Harvill); and The Grass of Oblivion, by Valentin Katayev, translated by Robert Daglish (Macmillan).

In its review of five 5s. books: Do Something about migraine; Rheumatism; Those Nerves; Those Arteries; and Your health (The Universal Tandem Publishing Co.), the Nursing Mirror of February 1969 complains that only two have an index . . .

'This is unfortunate because I always feel that a patient, in deciding whether or not to buy a book like this, will flick through to find an index and then look up the particular aspect of the subject with which he is most personally concerned.'

The absence of an index is certainly apt to do something about inducing migraine, to give you a fit of those nerves and otherwise affect your health.

BOOK REVIEWS

Commercial and industrial records storage

The first 18 chapters deal with the variety of items to be stored starting with business records and ending with videotapes and including such problem items as maps, plans and charts, masters (i.e. litho plates, stencil masters, film intermediates, etc.), patents and standards, recordings (disc and tape), samples and what the author calls 'information at your elbow', or, in other words notetaking for a desk information file.

As the text of the book is no longer than 167 pages and contains 129 illustrations, it is obvious that there is no detailed information about the storage problems of any single item. But what Mr. Collison conveys is the immediate common-sense advice which will assist the user in his initial efforts in storing material and will indicate a reasonable range of equipment available for storage. No costs are given, but the names and addresses of manufacturers (or suppliers) of all the equipment illustrated are listed in an appendix, as are the associations which can give advice on storage problems and their indexing or cataloguing. The Society of Indexers is among the bodies listed, but its address as given is that of the Editor of The Indexer, instead of its own address: c/o Barclays Bank Ltd., 1 Pall Mall, London, S.W.1.

Anybody who had had first-hand experience of ordering some of the materials listed in the book, would certainly have placed emphasis on other aspects of the problem than those chosen by Mr. Collison, also on the illustrations selected. In dealing with press cuttings, for instance, he gives ample treatment to the cabinets for storing the material, but too little on the arrangement of the cuttings within the drawers and the types of envelopes and folders available.

Sometimes the illustrations are not very logically placed in the text. In the section on film storage there are no illustrations relating to the subject, but as it has obviously been an editorial decision to place an illustration on every other page, some illustration had to be found whether or not it was relevant to the subject in hand.

But, as Mr. Collison states in his introduction, 'once an object is taking up storage space it should be made to yield good value for its retention' and he makes the important point that 'the treatment of each of these sources of information in isolation is necessary—because of the varying nature of the materials of which they are composed—but unfortunate, for it is important to think of all information as one entity'. His stress on the necessity to consider information services as a necessity, as in the USA and USSR, rather than a luxury or auxiliary service, to be cut back at will, cannot be stated too often, particularly to the commercial and industrial concerns to whom this book is directed, and it will perhaps help to convince those managements of the desirability of exploiting all materials in their service.

The excellent nine-page index in double-column with line-by-line sub-headings deals in great detail with the text and illustrations; it has possibly been somewhat inflated to convey an authoritative impression, one feels. But all in all a useful reference book if one is not seeking information in depth.

Elizabeth Wallis.


The large amount of English poetry in manuscript in the Bodleian Library is for the most part to be found in collections of works by various authors or as quotations embedded in works in prose by a different author, although some manuscript poems...