Mary Kendall, in her interesting article in *The Indexer* (9, October 1974, p.66), has produced evidence to show that the improvement in the indexing of books over the past seventy or so years has been by no means uniform. It may be that I am prejudiced in favour of the old as against the new but I am bound to say that in the course of a fairly long career as a bibliographer and researcher I have made similar observations; and indeed I am tempted to assert that in the case of certain reference works a steady decline since about 1914 can be traced.

One may, for example, take *Hansard*, a fairly essential source for the student of constitutional and political history. Volume 63 of the Fourth Series (1898) has a cross-reference from 'bicycles' to "cycles" and from "cemeteries" to "burial grounds". Whereas the index to volume 43 of the Fifth Series (Commons) (1912) also has cross-references, for example, from "cattle" to "foot and mouth disease", there is no such cross-reference in volume 243 containing the sessional index for 1929-30, though there are numerous unrepeated entries under both headings. Coming to more recent volumes, that for 1973-4 (vol. 865) contains no cross-references between "migrant workers" and "immigrants".

One can in fact multiply such examples in recent volumes. Thus volume 300 of *Hansard* (Lords) containing discussions on the Voluntary Euthanasia Bill has no index entry under "Euthanasia", only under "voluntary" (1969). In volume 687 of *Hansard* (Commons) (1964) the entry under "Kennedy National Memorial Committee" refers only to a written answer on the membership and for the Committee's report it is necessary to refer to "President Kennedy Memorial". For the resulting Bill there is yet a third entry under "John F. Kennedy Memorial Bill". The 1964-65 sessional index has two references under "Kennedy Memorial" and a third under "President Kennedy Memorial". In none of these cases are there any cross-references. Although there is nothing under "John" in the 1964-65 index, the 1965-66 index has a reference under "John F. Kennedy Memorial Stone, Runnymede" but nothing under "Kennedy" or "President".

The late President Kennedy is not the only overseas statesman who has been so treated. The 1966-67 index has two references under "President de Gaulle", one of which is repeated under "de Gaulle, President" together with another which does not appear under the "President" heading. By contrast, President Johnson does not appear at all in this index under "Johnson", although there are two references to him under "President". In the 1967-68 index the two references to him are split, one being under "Johnson", the other under "President". President Nixon appears separately under "President" (two entries) and "Nixon" (one entry) without repetition or cross-referencing, indeed cross-referencing seems to be conspicuous by its absence in the modern index to Hansard. President Kaunda of Zambia appears only under "President" and again under "President of Zambia"; there is nothing under "Kaunda".

I do not myself believe that Parliamentary indexing has always been of so low a standard; indeed, in the course of fairly extensive researches among the early Journals of both Houses of Parliament I have found a fairly high standard of indexing. Thomas Vardon and Thomas Erskine May's General index to the journals of the House of Commons 1547-1714 (1850-52), for example, is an immensely detailed and laborious work, and many of the other general indexes and calendars may well vie with it for completeness and liberality of cross-reference. My own somewhat tentative view is that when economies have to be made, indexes are the first to suffer: that the First World War was a time of great financial stress (witness the abandonment of red tape for white by Government departments because of the high cost of the dye) and that although there have since been times of greater opulence, no one has thought of re-establishing the *Hansard* index on its old, liberally cross-referenced footing, any more than they have thought of reinstating "red tape", at least in its literal sense. I think also that the decline in public interest in Parliamentary proceedings has played its part in perpetuating this situation.

Finally, I have also had occasion to observe a deterioration in the index to the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* over recent years. There is some truth
in the assertion by “old fogies” that the eleventh edition of 1911, the last to be wholly edited in England, was the best; and whilst the fifteenth edition recently published may be an improvement on its predecessors, I do not think it tells you immediately, for example, who Atossa was, although recent printings have included her (unindexed) under ‘Artaxerxes’. The preface to the 1911 index by Janet E. Hogarth and J. Malcolm Mitchell is still very well worth consulting by all students of indexing, and the index itself is a remarkable example of “how to do it”. Similarly the Gentleman’s Magazine, even so early as the 1730s, had separate indexes of subjects, names, and books, and paragraphs on each page are lettered A to H for ease of reference, as is done too in the more modern All England Law Reports, where nine letters on each page (A to I) are used.

In the field of legal indexing, indeed, it is possible to detect signs of an improvement in recent years and certainly I have found none of deterioration. Thus the fourth (Hailsham) edition of Halsbury’s laws of England now being published has an index of words and phrases for each volume in addition to the very detailed subject index which it shares with its predecessors. The 1909 edition of Stone’s justices’ manual has no index entry under “Counsel”, though there are references to counsel in the text, whereas there are several such index entries in the 1974 edition of that work. That may be in part a reflection of increased provision for representation by counsel in magistrates’ courts over the years but I believe nevertheless that further research would reveal other slight improvements in legal indexing of this kind. Indeed, the Index to legal periodicals was not published at all before the turn of the century, and in order to present a fair picture one must certainly bear in mind the fact that even poor indexing is better than no indexing at all. Thus the index to Stone’s justices’ manual is arranged by letter of the alphabet and then by page; ‘Constantinople won by the turkes 393’ follows ‘Jack Cade his rebellion 388’ and precedes ‘Callis [Calais] in faction 406’. In a work like the Annals such a form is of course semi-chronological and may actually, in certain circumstances at least, be of greater assistance than the conventional form of index: further research on the rationale of some of these old indexes seems desirable. In conclusion, I may perhaps be allowed to regret the passing of chapter synopses which used to form a sort of Mr. Jingle type resumé in almost every biographical or autobiographical work until comparatively recent times. Sir Harold Nicolson was, I believe, almost the last major writer to make use of them in England, and they are particularly useful when one is trying to track down an anecdote which may not be easily indexable or memorable under a particular word. Usually they were included in the list of contents at the front of the book and could be read as a summary of it.

As I have said, a poor index is better than no index at all, and I think it is a pity that the index to Notes and Queries has not apparently been cumulated since that for the period up to 1947 was published in 1955. As I am contrasting this with the past I am bound to point out that the earlier series of Notes and Queries were cumulated every twelve volumes. Of course there is now an index to words and phrases in existence which covers a wide variety of other periodicals as well as Notes and Queries but it is not, I think, as widely available in libraries as Notes and Queries itself, and the deficiency actively discourages research.

To return to book-indexing, it may sometimes be a mistake to assume too readily that early indexes are “primitive” or unsystematized, for, just as in the case of old spelling, they sometimes have weird and wonderful rules of their own. Thus the index to Stow’s Annals (1615 edn. by E. Howes) is arranged by letter of the alphabet and then by page; ‘Constantinople won by the turkes 393’ follows ‘Jack Cade his rebellion 388’ and precedes ‘Callis [Calais] in faction 406’. In a work like the Annals such a form is of course semi-chronological and may actually, in certain circumstances at least, be of greater assistance than the conventional form of index: further research on the rationale of some of these old indexes seems desirable. In conclusion, I may perhaps be allowed to regret the passing of chapter synopses which used to form a sort of Mr. Jingle type resumé in almost every biographical or autobiographical work until comparatively recent times. Sir Harold Nicolson was, I believe, almost the last major writer to make use of them in England, and they are particularly useful when one is trying to track down an anecdote which may not be easily indexable or memorable under a particular word. Usually they were included in the list of contents at the front of the book and could be read as a summary of it.

G. Chowdharay-Best