Some of the horrors of indexes described by a reference-minded librarian will help authors and publishers to amend their ways

In the December 28th, 1956, issue of the Times Literary Supplement the following letter appeared:

"Sir: It is proposed to form a Society of Indexers. . . . Its aims would include the following: (1) to improve the standard of book indexing and secure some measure of uniformity in indexing technique; (2) to provide a pool from which publishers and authors could draw experienced indexers; and (3) to communicate from time to time papers and notes on the subject. If any of your readers who are interested will kindly communicate with the undersigned Hon. Secretary pro tern. at 4 Fitzroy Street, London, W.1 (Museum 3786), they will be sent particulars of the proposed Society.

/s/ G. NORMAN KNIGHT."

This Society was founded at an inaugural meeting on March 30th, 1957. It is the first society of this kind (as far as can be ascertained) in the world. As of January, 1958, there were 160 members, only four of whom were in the U.S.A. A publication entitled The Indexer is being issued by the Society. The first number made its appearance in March of this year. The most useful information which it contains is a list of 86 books published between July-December, 1957, without indexes. The list is prefaced by an interesting remark: "We shall continue to include similar lists in The Indexer until the necessity for it ceases."

All of this is preliminary to the purpose of this article, which is being written by an ex-Reference Librarian who feels that one of the deterrents met in reference work is the lack of an index or the lack of a good index in non-fiction books. Due to the fact that many indexes seem to be bad indexes, the writer has on numerous occasions been persuaded to be an indexer. On a university campus, once an author has completed writing a book, he has little interest in learning the techniques of indexing, and is more than willing to relinquish the task to someone else. This is the time for the Reference Librarian to offer his services.

Of course, there is often the University Press, which insists that the author compile his own index. This usually becomes a really worthless index. A stenographer then goes through the page proof, listing these headings on 3 x 5 cards with the pages references, which means that there may be as many as fifty pages listed after certain entries, with no breakdowns. The user of the book must consequently spend time checking all the references, with perhaps only two of them being important.
Some examples of this type of indexing are Ker, W. P. *On Modern Literature*, Oxford at the Clarendon Press, 1955. Under John Milton, there are forty page references. Only seven of these are of any importance to one interested in Milton; the balance merely mentions his name in a group or in some inconsequential manner.

The same type of indexing is found in *Karl Marx's Capital* by A. O. Lindsay, published in 1925. There are twelve references under Social Control, fourteen under Value, labour theory of; and twenty-three under Economists, the English. This index is, in fact, wholly inconsistent, for there are some headings with subheadings arranged in alphabetical order:

- evolution of capitalism, 38, 43, 64;
- of industry, 43, 115, 119, 121-2;
- of society, 19, 22, 38, 43, 48, 50, 114;
- of species, 21-2;

while other headings with subheadings are not arranged alphabetically or by page:

- Marx, Karl; his inconsistencies, 10;
- his scientific method, 110-11, 13-15;
- an original thinker, 12, 81;
- his relation to the thought of his time, 13;
- his indebtedness to Hegel, 15-26, 114;

and so on and on it goes in this hapless fashion.

One of my favourite books, Van Passen's *Days of our Years*, published in 1939, is impractical for reference personnel. There are forty-three different page references under Hitler, thirty-eight under Franco, twenty-six under Haile Selassie, and seventeen under Jews. Chapter III is entitled "Parisian Days" and has delightful references to Paris, but Paris is not mentioned in the index.

Biography lends itself to inadequate indexing, perhaps more than any other type of book. Two recent examples are Seaver's *David Livingstone* and Walter's *Albert Gallatin*. The first title devotes 5 1/2 columns to Livingstone in the index. The whole book is about Livingstone. Would it, therefore, not be more logical to use headings such as:

- Matipa's island, 621
- Sierre Leone, 319-20
- Zambesi expedition, 302-5.

Under Livingstone, those items and many more are arranged by pagination. This section of the index is, therefore, hopeless, unless one takes time to check through the 5 1/2 columns.

On first examination the Gallatin index seems detailed and usable. With use it becomes irritating. Under the heading, Tariff, four of the references were useless, four of them referred to one sentence, and only two references were worthwhile. Under Burr, six of the references were inconsequential, and two, p. 128-132 and 163-169, were excellent. Inaccuracies and omissions also abounded, i.e., yellow fever p. 54 is on p. 55; Harvard, Yale and Middlebury are in the index, but Princeton, mentioned in the same sentence, is omitted.
Travel books need the best of indexes and often have them. Librarians, reading of San Francisco before the July conference, no doubt had a most unhappy index reference, as did I. Upon seeing Gilliam's *San Francisco Bay*, I immediately turned to Sausalito, the spot which had so delighted me on my last trip to San Francisco, and was delighted to see in the index:

Sausalito, 49, 58, 59, 63, 112, 128, 222, 224, 266, 284, 291.

To my great disappointment, not one of these references gave pertinent information on Sausalito. The same disappointment occurred with the references to Nob Hill, Santa Barbara, and even with three of the references under Fisherman's Wharf. The index was seemingly a concordance, and what is the value of a concordance in a travel book?

This brings up the question of a Table of Contents eliminating the need for an index. A good example of a book with a detailed table of contents but an inadequate index is Professor Hitti's *Lebanon in History*. As a geographer interested in Lebanon, I checked in the index the following headings: (1) rainfall, (2) temperature, (3) climate, (4) agriculture, (5) trade, (6) commerce, and (7) markets, and found nothing. Some of these headings could be found through the detailed table of contents, but anything unalphabetized is certainly the long way around. The index seems to be chiefly a name index and not even an excellent name index, as inconsequential references are listed. Try the American University in Beirut. This book had been reviewed in the *Library Journal*, December 1st, 1957, p. 3101, with a notation that the index was inadequate. The book's author was disturbed by this comment and, as a result, wrote, in defense of his index, a letter which was published in the January 1st, 1958, issue of the *Library Journal*, p. 78, and answered on the same page.

The books with no indexes at all are apparently written or published by egotists who feel that a book is only to be read through in its entirety. If it is ever to be referred to again, it must be either read through or the user must have such an uncanny memory that the needed passage can easily be found.


The first mentioned would prove useful on many occasions, as it deals with a variety of subjects such as the social sciences, the humanities, the natural sciences, retail training, etc., etc. Without an index it becomes a white elephant on the library bookshelf as well as on the shelf of the individual. What a waste to publish such an item!

The dust jacket on Chaplin's *The Fifty Two Days*, an ABC reporter's story of the battle that freed France, immediately arouses interest. Who does not want to read the answer to: (1) How do our soldiers regard General Patton? (2) What are De Gaulle, Bradley, and Hodges like in person? (3) What second use did parachutes have in France? etc., etc. When the reader or the Reference Librarian
examines the book only to find that there is not an index, or even a table of contents, one loses all feeling for the book. It cannot be particularly worthwhile with such an omission.

Akin to this is America Rebels, by Richard Dorson. It is a book of interesting personal narratives of the American Revolution. From the bibliography, one would assume that considerable research had been done, but without an index of what value is this research?

Peattie's Parade with Banners, 1957, is a reprint of articles from the Reader's Digest, and was indexed in the Reader's Guide. The book is also slated for the Essay Index. One can, therefore, find the material in a roundabout method. However, an index is really such a small expense that it seems unreasonable not to have one.

Even an indexer or a reference librarian admits that there are a few non-fiction books which seemingly need no index as they are read or scanned for pleasure. Such books are: Targ's Bouillabaisse for Bibliophiles, World Publishing Co. 1955; Wallace's Love is More Than Luck. Funk. 1957; Wertenbaker's Death of a Man. Random House. 1957.

In contrast, there are some fiction books which would be of much more use with an index. We would certainly appreciate an index to Don Quixote, Marjorie Morningstar, and Anthony Adverse. Some fiction provided with excellent indices is proof of this, such as the edition of Jane Austen's Novels, prepared by R. W. Chapman. The need for indexing some fiction is attested to by the publication of indices such as, A Reader's Handbook to Proust, An Index to Remembrance of Things Past, and a Census of Finegan's Wake, an Index of Characters and Their Roles.

There is sometimes an index compiled by an author or by an experienced indexer in a subject field which is not successful because it was not geared to its clientele. Thrall's The World, Its Land and Peoples, published in 1948 by Harcourt, is such a book. It was written as a junior high school textbook. The author of this article indexed the book. As a geographer and as a reference librarian, I regarded this as my best index to date. Large headings were used, such as agriculture, animals, grazing, etc. These were fine for the adult but the junior high school student needed more repetition, i.e., under China there should be subheadings of agriculture, fruits, etc. In fact this repetition might have made the index more valuable to everyone.

A scheme of uniform entries should be used in every index. For an education book the entries in the Education Index could be followed; for the engineering book, the Engineering Index, etc. Wilson indexes can usually be depended upon. However, librarians criticized loudly Library Literature, as it did not come up to the standard of the other indexes. As one of the grippers, it was with pleasure that I noted in the December index that the indexing of the September issue of College and Research Libraries had greatly improved.

A few indexes are so detailed that they are dictionaries. Such an example is Myths and Legends of China by E. J. C. Werner, published in 1922. The index
entries read like this:

Jade. Symbol of purity; the Jade Emperor, 130.

Kalpa. A period during which a physical universe is formed and destroyed, 128

Lei Tsu, or Wen Chung, God of Thunder; agent to Yuan-Shih T’ien-ts’un, 128

P’an Ku. Mythical being, alleged first development out of chaos and fashioner of the universe, the Chinese Adam; myths of, 76 sq.

Even publishers’ catalogues would be more helpful if indexed. Some publishers realize that if the catalogue is arranged by subject, the index should be by author and title. Under this category could be mentioned Barnes & Noble, Faber & Faber, Inter-science, Iowa State, Macmillan, and Routledge and Kegan Paul.

Some publishers, such as Pantheon and the University of Kentucky, have only author indexes, while others, such as Blackwell, Harcourt, McBride, and Viking, do not bother with any index at all.

The idea that indexes are deteriorating in our modern age is a fallacy. When I first became a reference librarian, an exciting reference question came to me. I was to produce a menu of the 16th century. Hours were spent in searching. It was finally found in Ditchfield’s The City Companies of London, 1904. The index was of no help, however. The menu for a 1506 dinner was under Salters Company, and the description of a 1518 feast was under Goldsmith’s Company. Hours could have been saved by an adequate index, a truth most reference librarians learn early in the game.

I would like to close by mentioning some outstanding indexes. The first is to be found in the two volume edition of Leland Baldwin’s Stream of American History, published by American Book Company in 1952. The index is long and divided. Volume One has five pages in the author index (for notes) and fifteen pages in the subject index. Volume Two has seven index pages of authors and twenty pages of subjects. There are breakdowns in the subject section, i.e.:

- Balkan states after World War I, 532; overrun by Germany, 697
- Conservatism, Southern, 230 ff; Bostonian, 261-262
- Denmark sells Virgin Islands, 431-432; overrun by Germany, 695; and
- North Atlantic Treaty, 889

Even the dates of the persons mentioned in the subject index are given, i.e.:

- Beard, Charles (1874-1948), historian, 377
- Davis, Henry (1861-1940), movie pioneer, 165

Dr. Baldwin takes no credit for this index, but admits freely that it was done by a professional indexer, Lorna Dietz of the American Book Company. Dr. Baldwin merely suggested some of the headings which he would like to have included. The inconsequential items are omitted due to space as the index is unusually long as it is. Baldwin’s Recent American History, published in 1954, has an equally fine index.

A 1957 imprint with a worth-mentioning index is Lawrence Wylie’s Village in the Vaucluse. The breakdowns in this index are found under important
headings such as family, political parties, school, etc. An example of the breakdown under economizing is as follows:

- economizing: on food, 165-167; on bottles and boxes, 167-168; on paper, 168; on clothing, 168-169; on fuel, 169-170; on electricity, 171; on taxes, 171-172.

The simplest of indexes is often quite adequate depending on the book and its purpose. Such a book is *British Historical Portraits*, published by Cambridge University Press, 1957. There is an index of artists and another of sitters. This is simple but certainly adequate.

An exceptionally valuable and unusual index is found in *Conrad’s Gates of Fear*. Instead of listing individual bullfighters in the index, names which cannot be remembered in all probability, large headings have been chosen:

- Bullfighters, chronological list, 38-41;

Instead of putting all the bullfights in Spain under the name of the country, names of cities have been used, such as Madrid, Seville, Valencia, etc. This index evidences the “reading through” of the manuscript before the index was even started—a must for a good indexer.

And, of course, *The Introduction to Reference Work* by Margaret Hutchins is invaluable to the librarian, chiefly because of the superb index and table of contents. What a joy it is to have a book with such a trustworthy index that one can refer to it at the last moment before an important meeting and know that the desired reference can be found in a matter of minutes.

Lord Campbell could be called the patron saint of the indexer for he wrote: “So essential did I consider an index to be that I proposed to bring a bill into Parliament to deprive an author who publishes a book without an index of the privilege of copyright and moreover to subject him for his offence to a pecuniary penalty.”

**ONERY-ANDERY**

E. M. HATT

Every now and then an indexer wearies of the conventions which ensure succinctness and space-saving, and just lately I have grown very tired of the onery-andery of indexes compiled by myself. No one would deny the usefulness of “and” as a linking-word which allows the indexer to pass on to the reader of his index some of the synthesizing that is the “invisible” work done by indexers. However, it has occurred to me more than once recently that this “and” can be too often used . . . not too often for indexer’s convenience, but too often for faithful reflection of authors’ meanings.