idea, I am happy to let him have the last word today. He was Lord Campbell, and however unsound he might have been in Nisi Prius, he had the right ideas on indexes:

So essential did I consider an index to be to every book, 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.

TABLE TALK

From 'Table Talk', The Gentleman's Magazine, Volume CCXLI (CCXLII), July to December, 1878:

254. It cannot fail to interest readers of the Gentleman's Magazine to learn that the Council of the Index Society are discussing the propriety of supplying a new and complete index to the entire Magazine. For nearly two centuries the Gentleman's Magazine has been a recognized authority for innumerable facts, all of them difficult, and some impossible, to find in other quarters. As the work will be extensive, and proportionately costly, the Council seek voluntary co-operation from without. It is probable that some of my readers may be able to assist in a labour that is a tribute to the importance of this periodical and that will largely augment the value of the complete series.

From 'Table Talk', The Gentleman's Magazine, Volume CCXLI (CCXLII), July to December, 1880:

381-382. Among recent meetings the place of honour belongs to that of the Index Society. Without fully accepting the implication of the American Minister, who was in the chair, that indexes constitute a royal road to learning, I will admit that they are among the greatest boons to scholarship that literature has supplied. That we have gone back in respect of index-making since the days of our ancestors will be obvious to any one who compares new books with old... Almost worse than the absence of an index, unpardonable as this is in the case of works of a certain description, is the presence of an index which is stupidly arranged or misleading. To that amusing and very readable periodical Notes and Queries I would commend, as an entertaining subject, a collection of curiosities of index-making.

GETTING IN BY THE BACK DOOR*

Frank Kermode

Indexes, which readers tend to take for granted, do not generate themselves spontaneously. They have to be more or less laboriously made.

I have made indexes, indeed I used to believe that only the author could make a satisfactory index to his own book; but this view was probably erroneous or naive. Or so I am persuaded by a communication from the Society of Indexers, and a copy of its journal, the Indexer. The Hon. Editor of the Indexer, Mr. L. M. Harrod, says he sent it to me on some inner prompting arising from a perusal of this column, which he "always scans and sometimes reads fully," a remark that might be thought particularly appropriate to his profession.

Good indexes are brief abstracts of learning. I

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have heard it said that more than one scholarly article on Milton was built on information extracted from the ample index to the Columbia edition; and from extreme youth I have been aware of the possibilities of guilty use. From the first time I read them almost 40 years ago I have had vaguely in mind Swift's words in the great "Digression on Digressions" in "A Tale of a Tub"; for this occasion I have looked them up.

"The most accomplished way of using books at present," says Swift, "is two-fold: either, first to serve them as men do lords—learn their titles exactly and then brag of their acquaintance; or, secondly, which is indeed the choicer, the profounder and politer method, to get a thorough insight into the index by which the whole book is governed or turned, like fishes by the tail. For to enter the palace of learning by the great gate requires an expense of time and forms, therefore men of such haste and little ceremony are content to get in by the back door."

The idleness we enjoy in these polite times, he goes on, is the fruit of labour, the labour of those who abstract, systematize and index. It was his friend Pope who coined the term "index-learning," saying that this practice would "turn no student pale. Yet holds the eel of science by the tail."

Evidently these wits found something shoddy in the use of alphabetical indexes terminally situated. The practice of putting indexes at the end had not been universal; in the early years of printed books they often came at the beginning.

Shakespeare, for example, always thought of indexes as coming before the book proper and giving a brief abstract of what was to follow. When Hamlet, in the Closet scene, states with excessive excitement that his mother's "act" has been deplorable in every way, she asks him "Ay me, what act, that roars so loud and thunders in the index?" And Iago, commenting on the way Desdemona takes Cassio's hand, claims that it signifies lechery, that it is "an index and obscure prologue to the history of lust and foul thoughts." In fact Shakespeare uses the word five times, and always in this sense; information I can offer because I looked it up in Spevack's big computer concordance, itself a sort of super-index; though a computer printout is lacking in the amenities indexers like to introduce in good typographical presentations.

But the Shakespearian or annunciatorial index has long since disappeared. When we demand an index we are asking for a tailpiece. The Society of Indexers thinks we should make this demand much more often. Its patron saint might be Lord John Campbell, who proposed legislation that would have deprived authors of "the privilege of copyright" as a penalty for publishing an unindexed book.

Reviewers today occasionally have to complain ("the lack of an index is a disgraceful piece of sloth"—The Sunday Telegraph on Harold Macmillan's "The Past Masters" Oct. 26, 1975) but in general, at least until the times grow harder, publishers seem resigned to having indexes. Very often they are the work of professional indexers, sometimes, but by no means always, checked by the author.

The Indexer is the trade paper. Among other things it collects testimony about deficient or absent indexes (I got the Macmillan reference from its pages). It awards a medal for the best index of the year. The issue I scanned led with an article on "How to recognise a good index" that contained little to surprise me, though its closing words ("a proven record of successful use to retrieve information from a text is a sufficient measure of a good index") reminded me of the existence of a discipline known as Information Retrieval. Later on there are some tough articles on this subject. A review of something called PRECIS (Preserved Context Index System) talks about role operators, primary strings, and the like. Another essay deals with Physical Substrates in Index Evaluation, commending the visual mobility and "Structure recognition" of "Panoramic output".

It turns out, though, that the familiar printed page is "panoramic output"; it gives the user "eye mobility as opposed to the relatively cumbersome manipulation-dependent mobility of the card index user."

Apparently simple matters can grow difficult when professionally inquired into. Indexes, which for Swift resemble fishes' tails, are now outputs of the total information storage system; like everything else they have grown much harder to talk about, and perhaps only paid-up members of the Society of Indexers should try. Through their professional society the indexers express some fear that they may be the first victims if publishers fall on really hard times. They wish not to be; and they want books to go on having indexes, preferably made by themselves and made well. As a rank amateur one can only wish them luck.