The second of anything is notoriously the weak one. Second novels tend to be disappointing; singers' second records tend to be pale copies of their first. The reason is not far to seek: in the first, you say whatever you are really anxious to say, in the second, you use whatever is left over; by the third (if you last that long) you may have found your feet. The second volume of The Indexer—as I suggested in the previous instalment of this series—has been showing some weakness. But the Autumn 1960 issue shows confidence and a more certain sense of direction. It seems much more sure of itself.

I say this despite the inclusion of one of the most misleading pieces I've read in a long time. An American indexer, John Askling, had been invited to contribute but being ill had not done so. Instead, the journal reprinted an older piece of his called 'Words at work'. This was, bluntly, a ride on a hobby horse. He decries skimming and skipping and insists on reading word by word, checking the meaning of each word as one goes along, asking oneself whether it is noun, verb, adjective or whatever, and analysing punctuation and sentence-type. How well one remembers one's schoolteachers in those days doing the same. It does not, of course, work. Most of us realize that an indexer reading thus would produce a disaster—the index weeks late and poorly done. For words have, in isolation, no particular meaning; intelligent reading requires one to take in a passage a phrase or a clause at a time, rather than a word. If you don't believe this, take D. H. Lawrence's one word 'Bats!' in his poem about them. By itself it could be a rude comment on someone's mental state, a sportsman exclaiming about what he had forgotten to bring, or an awareness of creatures in the air. Without the exclamation mark it could be a verb answering the question 'what does a cricketer do when he doesn't field or bowl?'. I hope too many readers weren't led astray by Mr Askling.

Elsewhere in the journal, there was a good deal of basic reference material: lists of officials and aims; lists of newly-elected members; a list of recent relevant books; an annual report and a piece on the Society's progress; a list of standards for indexes to learned and scientific periodicals. It doesn't exactly make for fascinating reading but—then as now—it's very useful stuff to have around.

The longest signed article, 'Indexing a classification scheme' by J. Mills, was in a way rather peripheral. In essence, it is an account of the logic of the Dewey decimal classification system, and how the system itself can be chain-indexed. It is a long, detailed and very thorough piece which does indeed give an idea of how Dewey works. I'm not completely convinced that it can usefully be applied to any other indexing. Nevertheless, if you want to find your way easily around your local library it could be useful.

So could—in theory—'Lack of indexes in reports of conferences' (C. W. Hanson and Marian Janes). This is one of those worthy and carefully researched articles that one always intends to reread carefully and never quite does. I think that it's quite hard, in practice, to get excited over the lack of an index to 'Industrial carbon and graphite', a 630-page report of a conference of the Society of Chemical Industry—one of the 59% of such publications which went unindexed in the late fifties.

I was more interested by a first rumbling of the ever-present dispute: indexes or indices. Now actually I think that indices are those little numbers you use in Maths to indicate higher powers—and I usually invoke higher powers when I see the word used as the plural of index in our sense. Henry B. Wheatley seemed to agree and in his 1878 book What is an index? he quoted Shakespeare in support:

And in such indexes, although small pricks
To their subsequent volumes, there is seen
The baby figure of the giant mass
Of things to come at large.

Troilus and Cressida

Clearly Shakespeare was talking about what we would now call a table of contents—but equally clearly if he says it's indexes, then it ain't indices. I think that settles the matter!

Finally, I was much pleased by some index entries from a book by A. Lapthorn Smith entitled How to be useful and happy from 60 to 90. Entries include:

Beard, long white, don't wear
Carriage and pair shortens life
Cook, good, source of danger to elderly man
and
Otherdom leads to happiness

I'm all in favour of a bit of Otherdom now and then.

Ann Edwards