John Grant set an unusual note at the head of the bibliography in his volume, *Dreamers* (Ashgrove Press, 1984):

In line with my policy in earlier books, I have indicated by * a book which has a lousy index, and by ** a book without an index at all. Publishers and authors who feel aggrieved about their books being in the * category should try to use the indexes concerned.

Indeed, while reviews are written by early samplers of books, back-of-the-book bibliographies are the work of those who have made actual trial and use of them; the verdict of the true enduser. Perhaps we should watch for bibliographical comment on the quality of indexes even more keenly than for that of reviewers.

An unusually bitter comment occurs in the 19-page bibliography to *Food in history* by Reay Tannahill (Eyre Methuen, 1973):

*Pyke, Magnus. Man and food* London and New York, 1970. (Nutritional knowledge and current research; a valuable summary marred by an abysmal index.)

*Man and food* is published by Weidenfeld and Nicolson in their World University Library series. It has 247 text pages, heavily illustrated. Information retrieval problems start there; the page numbers are in upper, outer page corners, and usually do not occur where there is any illustration or table, as most of these are set at the tops of the pages—often with the caption at the top of the page opposite. Left-side chapter openings also have no page numbers. Many pages thus are unnumbered; but the index references to lead them are so poor that their lack hardly seems crucial, after all.

The index is set triple-column over three pages, with numerals in bold referring to illustrations. All its page references are single, double (24–5, 24–25, 60–1, 60–61, sic, all occur) or single followed by *et seq.* Closer discrimination is apparently not possible, even where the index entry copies the chapter or section heading. Thus, chapter 10, ‘The evolution of technological processes’, pages 168–85, is indexed as TECHNOLOGICAL PROCESSES, evolution of, 168 et seq., while chapter 7, ‘Deficiency diseases’, pages 110–27, manages only DEFICIENCY 110 and DISEASE 110.

Three pages of index to 243 of text seems skimpy—nevertheless, there are many duplicated entries, including the 11 lines under FOOD PRESERVATION, which are repeated in full under PRESERVATION OF FOOD, with a line there added (BY IRRADIATION 201, 202–3). Space saved by substituting cross-references might have been allotted to glosses for the such bare, unexplained entries as:

- Bonteheuwel; Braconnot; Clary; Emmer; Ergosterol; Ghee; Gracilis; Hemeralopia; Phytophthora; Terpenes; Voit

(Respectively, these are a settlement near Cape Town; a French chemist; a spice; hulled wheats; a chemical compound; clarified butter; a muscle; night-blindness; a fungus; oil constituents; a German chemist.)

Strangest, though, is the placing of entries. Some subjects can be found only as obscure subheadings, not having their own entry. CATTLE, COWS, CHILDREN and COOKING (perhaps the indexer was allergic to the letter C?) can be found only under:

- Breeds of cattle 32, 51 [actually pages 32–3 deal with the live-weight of cattle that land in Africa can sustain; no reference to Africa either]
- Endocrine glands of cow 45 [this is the only mention in the index of cows, whose blood plasma is tabulated on page 43, udder described on 44, emotions on pages 45–6, and appetites 46–50, with photographs of two on page 51.]
- Food/cooking of 10–11
- Weight of school children 230

Terminology is quite unsettled and disordered. ANIMALS has three subheadings, but no reference to WILD ANIMALS, which is a separate entry under W, nor to cattle or cows, so slighted here. FOOD yields the following mixture of main and subheadings:

- Food
  - colour in 184 [duplicated under colouring as 184: a full-page table]
  - cooking of 10–11
  - texture of 205, 206 [not entered under T]
- Food preservation [eleven lines, duplicated under P]
- Food synthesis 208 et seq. 210 [sic]
- cost of 223
- Food technology 168 et seq.
  - effects of in Africa 169 [still no reference to Africa under A]

Compare and contrast with these the following:

- Synthesis [an 8-line-entry, not including COST]
- Synthetic food 208 et seq. 210
  - nutritional value of 222
- Technological processes, evolution of 168 et seq.
  - Technology, effect of 246

Clearly, Reay Tannahill’s assessment is spot-on. We would welcome other assessments of indexes from bibliographies.