AN OUTSTANDING INDEX


There are two remarkable features about this somewhat heavy tome—I do not refer to avoirdupois. In the first place, although it was written by an English scientist, the late uncle of the actor, Sir Ralph Richardson, its index was compiled by an American, an article about whom had been found among the author’s papers and who was run to earth by one of the editors. This American indexer is in fact the Society’s Hon. Correspondent for the Northern States of the U.S.A., John Askling, A.B. Mr. Askling is index consultant to the American Telephone and Telegraph Co. (Bell Telephone Laboratories of New York City), associate editor of University Publishers, Inc., and index editor of Antiques magazine.

A very thorough job has Mr. Askling made of his task. The index covers 49 pages in double-column for some 300 pages of text (excluding bibliography), which is good measure, and it is about as comprehensive as anyone could wish. In accordance with the strong recommendation of the American Standard of Indexing the indexer’s name does receive an acknowledgment in the form of a postscript to the editor’s foreword. In a letter to me Mr. Askling explains that he will not allow his name on an index unless he “can control the policies and see it thru the press”, but that he cannot stop this kind of credit.

The second remarkable feature is that in this analytical study of the causes of wars Dr. Richardson has for considerable stretches deserted the literary form for pure mathematics and throughout the book the pages abound in symbols (for which both English and Greek letters are employed), in equations and logarithms. Fortunately for Mr. Askling the author did not have recourse to those unintelligible hieroglyphs, those squiggles and wiggles of which, we were assured at the recent ASLIB–Society of Indexers Joint Conference, modern scientific works largely consist, and which do not fit in any alphabetical arrangement and must be the indexer’s bane. Even so, Mr. Askling was confronted with a formidable task, which he has surmounted largely in the following manner:

Z, see Tip-group was offered protection by a third party.

ζ, see Tail-group fought for pay, regardless of the principles in dispute.

Under the first heading we are given the example of the British-Afghan War of 1878-80, while under the second we are offered six exemplifying wars. Mr. Askling believes that this may be the only index in which mathematical equations can be interpreted through known alphabetic symbols.

One entry in the index intrigued me. This was “Chineses”, which is explained in the text as follows: “I adopted the word Chineses to denote all those languages which are spoken in China and which are written in the Chinese ideograms”. What will Mr. H. D. Talbot (see p. 99) have to say to this?
Mr. Askling has adopted the columnar or “line-by-line” rather than the “run-on” method for his sub-headings and has managed to avoid the use of sub-sub-headings, sub-sub-sub-headings, etc., which I for one find thoroughly annoying. By the judicious employment of his sub-headings he is able usually to limit the page numbers after each entry to a reasonable amount. But I note that “League of Nations” has 19 page numbers in a solid row, while “Lienau, Carl Christian” has no fewer than 35. These are due to the printer’s omission of the word “references”. Again, it is observed that the entries under “Civil War” as a sub-heading to “U.S.A.” are nothing like as complete as those under “Civil War, U.S.A.” and it is suggested that in the former case a mere cross-reference to the latter would have sufficed. Again, while the items in the biography are (rightly, as I hold) included in the index, they occur under the name of the author unaccompanied by the title of his work.

These, however, are minor criticisms of what must under any count be considered a remarkably fine achievement. Its especial merit is the manner in which Mr. Askling has mastered the by-no-means easy arguments and conclusions of the author and has conveyed their meaning unerringly to his index, which thus becomes a real pointer to the book’s contents. Although it must be admitted that the points Dr. Richardson makes on homicide, aggressiveness, etc., might well be noted in this troubled world, for myself the text is almost as deadly as the quarrels it describes, and I feel thankful that it did not fall to my lot to have to compile this index.

G. N. K.

NEW MEMBERS

Individual

Gauntlett, Col. Henry Graham, of East Molesey, Surrey.
Gauntlett, Miss Vera, of East Molesey.
Haugh, George, of London, W.C.1.
Hughes, Arthur John Lloyd, of Halstead, Essex.
Newton, Miss Vera, B.Sc., of Putney, S.W.15.
Powell, Thomas Rowland, M.A., of East Cowes, I. of W.
Roberts, Harold Vernon Molesworth, of Wallington, Surrey.
Wise, Geoffrey William, of Enfield, Middlesex.

Institutional

British Nylon Spinners Ltd., Pontypool, Mon.
Kunsthistorisch Instituut der Rijksuniversiteit, Utrecht.
School of Library Service, University of California.