Indexer nascitur, non fit—
Lewis Carroll as indexer again

August A. Imholtz, Jr.

Further discussion of Carroll's indexes, including *Sylvie and Bruno*, and in particular of his system for a letter register to record personal correspondence.

How curious it is, Alice might have thought, that a novel should have an index, moreover an index prepared by the author himself! But as Hans H. Wellisch points out in his recent article in this journal,1 'Lewis Carroll as Indexer', that is precisely the case with Lewis Carroll's two late novels *Sylvie and Bruno* and *Sylvie and Bruno concluded*. Professor Wellisch focuses on the comic elements of Carroll's indexes to the Sylvie and Bruno books without attempting to put Carroll's lifelong interest in indexing into perspective. In focusing exclusively on the humorous entries of the Sylvie and Bruno novels, besides, he unnecessarily overlooks a significant development in Carroll's indexing and in his fiction itself.

Professor Wellisch quotes some of the famous examples of Carroll's indexing, e.g.:

- Boots for Horizontal Weather; I.14
- Bread-sauce appropriate for Weltering; I.58
- Horizontal Weather, Boots for; I.14
- Spherical, advantage of being; II.190

In Carroll's combined index to both novels, which appeared in 1893 in the first edition of *Sylvie and Bruno concluded* issued during Carroll's life, the Roman numeral 'I' following the entry refers to *Sylvie and Bruno* and 'II' refers to *Sylvie and Bruno concluded*. Both are followed by the page number of the text upon which the entry is to be found. These two novels by Lewis Carroll differ from his other fiction in a number of ways in addition to having their own indexes. Each of them, for example, is several times as long as either of the Alice books; but more importantly, the Sylvie and Bruno books were written with a moral—something studiously avoided in the humorous entries of the Sylvie and Bruno novels, besides, he unfortunately overlooks a significant development in Carroll's indexing and in his fiction itself.

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Further discussion of Carroll's indexes, including *Sylvie and Bruno*, and in particular of his system for a letter register to record personal correspondence.2

Nor can it be said that this early work foreshadows only the indexing technique of the later Carroll. Some of the verses in *The Rectory Magazine* remind today's readers of something, however indistinct, about the famous Alice books. Consider just one example:

*The Rectory Magazine*, a family magazine produced when Charles Lutwidge Dodgson was thirteen years old and some forty-three years before he would write the first of the Sylvie and Bruno books under his famous pseudonym 'Lewis Carroll', the following handwritten entries:

- A tale without a name (W.S.) 3, 15
- General, Things in (Ed.) 25
- Name, A tale without a (W.S.) 3, 15
- Rubbish, Reasonings on (Ed.) 1
- Things in General (Ed.) 25
- Twaddle on Telescopes (Ed.) 852

Indeed, there are many discussions of 'love' and 'being loved' in addition to that on page 77 of *Sylvie and Bruno*, and that discussion of love, in the view of some, sad to say, is the culmination of Lewis Carroll's creativity. Typical of the saccharine message that Carroll delivers in these novels is the conclusion of *Sylvie and Bruno concluded*:

'Sylvie's sweet lips shaped themselves to reply, but her voice sounded faint and very far away. The vision was fast slipping from my eager gaze; but it seemed to me, in that last bewildering moment, that not Sylvie but an angel was looking out through those trustful brown eyes, and that not Sylvie's but an angel's voice was whispering

'It is Love.'
As humorous as Carroll's indexes to his childhood magazines and late novels may be and as serviceable, if uninspired, his index to Tennyson's famous poem is, it is in the indexing system that Carroll devised for his personal correspondence that his real genius as an indexer may be seen. Lewis Carroll was a prolific correspondent (he once said that 'One third of my life seems to go in receiving letters, and the other two thirds in answering them'), writing to child friends, colleagues in academic disciplines, churchmen, publishers, theatre folk, politicians such as Lord Salisbury, etc. So numerous was his incoming and outgoing correspondence that he developed a letter register, a system for keeping track of the date, names, and subject matter of letters sent and received.

From 1 January 1861 until 8 January 1898 Carroll maintained his letter register, which reached 24 volumes. Alas, none of the register volumes have survived, but we do know that the last entry number used was 98721. He explained how to create and maintain such a letter register in a little pamphlet entitled 'Eight or Nine Wise Words About Letter Writing' published in 1890. Here are excerpts from his instructions together with a copy of some of his sample pages without which the instructions are of less utility. Unfortunately, it takes more than eight or nine words. Having procured a blank notebook, Lewis Carroll recommends that one proceed as follows:

Have a line ruled, in red ink, down each margin of every page, an inch off the edge (the margin should be wide enough to contain a number of 5 digits, easily...)

Write a precis of each Letter, received or sent, in chronological order. Let the entry of a 'received' Letter reach from the left-hand edge to the right-hand marginal line; and the entry of a 'sent' Letter from the left-hand marginal line to the right-hand edge. Thus the two kinds will be quite distinct, and you can easily hunt through the 'received' Letters by themselves, without being bothered with the 'sent' Letters; and vice versa.

I begin each entry by putting, at the top left-hand corner, the next-entry-number I am going to use, in full (the last 3 digits of each entry-number are enough afterwards); and I put the date of the year, at the top, in the centre.

I begin each entry with the last 3 digits of the entry number, enclosed in an oval (this is difficult to reproduce in print, so I have put round-parentheses here). Then, for the first entry in each page, I put the day of the month and the day of the week: afterwards 'do' is enough for the month-day, till it changes: I do not repeat the week-day.

Next, if the entry is not a letter, I put a symbol for 'parcel' (see Nos. 243, 245) or 'telegram' (see Nos. 230, 231) as the case may be.

I give each entry the space of 2 lines, whether it fills them or not, whenever I do this part of the 'making up', I need not begin at the beginning of the volume, but only at the earliest page that has not been attended to... I fill in the appropriate symbol, e.g., 'x' means omitted letters) and miss one or 2 numbers before I begin the next page.

At any odd moments of leisure, I make up the entry-book, in various ways, as follows:

1. I draw a second line, at the right-hand end of the 'received' entries, and at the left-hand end of the 'sent' entries. This I usually do pretty well 'up to date'. In my Register the first line is red, the second is blue: here I distinguish between them by making the first thin, and the second thick.

2. Beginning with the last entry, and going backwards, I read over the names till I recognize one as having occurred already: I then link the two entries together, by giving, in this case, the first 'foot reference': (see Nos. 217, 225). I do not keep this 'up to date', but leave it till there are 4 or 5 pages to be done. I work back till I come among entries that are supplied with 'foot references', when I once more glance through the last few pages, to see if there are any entries not yet supplied with head-references: their predecessors may need a special search.

If an entry is connected, in subject, with another under a different name, I link them by cross-references, distinguished from the head- and foot-references by being written further from the marginal line (see No. 229). When 2 consecutive entries have the same name, and are both of the same kind (i.e. both 'sent') I bracket them (see Nos. 221, 223, 225). Thus, wherever a break occurs in this extra line, it shows there is some matter still needing attention. I do not keep this anything like 'up to date', but leave it till there are 30 or 40 pages to look through at a time. When the first page of the volume is thus completely crossed out, I put a mark at the foot of the page to indicate this; and so with pages 2, 3, &c. Hence, whenever I do this part of the 'making up', I need not begin at the beginning of the volume, but only at the earliest page that has not got this mark.

All this looks very complicated, when stated at full length: but you will find it perfectly simple, when you have had a little practice.

In an exhaustive study of the principles at work in the letter register, Professor Francine Abeles has shown that Carroll's letter register 'employed in embryonic form twentieth century database concepts'. She phrases the elements of Carroll's

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Entry</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>29217</td>
<td>Ap. 1. (Tu) Jones, Mrs.</td>
<td>27518</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>217</td>
<td>sendig, J., a</td>
<td>225</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(218)</td>
<td>grand</td>
<td>28743</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>220</td>
<td>do. Scareham, H. [writes from Hotel, Monte Carlo] asking</td>
<td>222, 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(221) do. Wilkins &amp; Co. bill, for piano, £175 10s. 6d.</td>
<td>225</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>218</td>
<td>Ap. 3.</td>
<td>222</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>214</td>
<td>do. Cheatham &amp; Sharp. written 221 — enclosing previous letter</td>
<td>222</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G. N.</td>
<td>R. White Elephant arrived, addressed to you — send for it at once —' very savage.'</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29225</td>
<td>/90.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>217</td>
<td>Ap. 4. (F) Jones, Mrs. the</td>
<td>222</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>214</td>
<td>but no room for it at present, am sending it to Zoological Gardens.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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The Indexer Vol. 20 No. 1 April 1996
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References

3. Ibid. 43.
9. Abeles. 11-12.

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