# Some early guidance on arrangement and cross-referencing in an index

## H. B. Wheatley

*These extracts from Wheatley's* What is an index? *(1878) consider some issues of arrangement, alphabetical and otherwise, and the perils (and inadvertent humour) of cross-referencing.*

## Arrangement

Intimately connected with compilation is arrangement, for however well the contents of a book may be analysed, the result will not form a good Index unless it is well arranged.

An Index should be one and indivisible, and not broken up into several alphabets, thus every work ought to have its complete Index whether it is one volume or many. This important rule has frequently been neglected in English books, and is almost universally rejected in Foreign ones, to the great inconvenience of readers. An Index may be arranged either chronologically, alphabetically, or according to classes, but great confusion will be caused by uniting the three. The alphabetical arrangement is so simple, so convenient, and so easily understood by all, that it has naturally superseded the other forms, but some still cling to the rags of classification, in the belief that that is a more scientific arrangement. The evil of this is that the consulter is never sure whether the reference he requires may not be lurking in some place that he has missed, but in the case of a single alphabet an answer to the question 'Does the Index contain what I require?' is obtained at once. Classification is the reverse of this, for, as Mr Poole says in his observations on the proposal of one of his helpers to place Wealth, Finance, and Population under the head of Political Economy – 'the fatal defect of every classified arrangement is that nobody understands it except the person who made it and he is often in doubt.' The general principle here enunciated will perhaps be better understood by reference to a few examples. Brayley's *Surrey,* in five volumes, has a separate Index to each volume, and it is a pretty general experience that whatever is wanted is sure to be found in the last volume consulted. The new edition of Hutchins's *Dorset,* 1874, has at the end eight separate Indexes, 1. Places; *2.* Pedigrees ; 3. Persons; 4. Arms; 5. Blazons; 6. Glossarial; 7. Domesday; 8. Inquisitions. How much thought is here required which would not be needed were all united into one alphabet? The general Index to the Reports of the British Association is a most inconvenient one to use, as it is split up into six alphabets; but the evil of these subdivisions is most marked in Indexes to the various volumes of the *Athenaeum,* which are so subdivided that they are practically useless. Who would rack his brain to find under which of the many headings the subject he requires is likely to be hidden? These divided Indexes are the exception in English books, but abroad almost every Index is in two parts: 1. Persons; 2. Things. The Index to Arago's complete works has the three-fold division: 1. Auteurs; 2. Cosmique; 3. Matieres. If this division be made, it ought surely to be carried out correctly, and yet in the *Autoren Register* to Carus' and Engelmann's Bibliography of Zoology may be found the following entries: *Schreiben; Schriften; Zu* Humboldts Cosmos; *Zur* Fauna.

The inconveniences of classification in an index are so palpable that it is needless to add more, but a list of titles of books that have given trouble to bibliographers, and at sundry times have been misarranged, will perhaps be amusing. Edgeworth's Essay on Irish Bulls and a Treatise on the Great Seal have been placed under the heading of *Zoology;* Napier's Bones under *Anatomy;* Swinburne's Under the Microscope under *Optical Instruments;* a volume of Poems, entitled the Viol and Lute, under *Musical Instruments*; Buskin's Notes on the Construction of Sheepfolds under *Agriculture;* McEwen on the Types under *Printing*; and most famous of all, Link, de Stellis Marinis, under *Astronomy.* Disraeli reports an amusing anecdote of 'an honest friar who compiled a church history and placed in the class of ecclesiastical writers Guarini, the Italian poet; this arose from a most risible blunder: on the faith of the title of his celebrated amorous pastoral *Il Pastor Fido, "*The Faithful Shepherd," our good father imagined that the character of a curate, vicar, or bishop, was represented in this work.'

Such incongruities as these had a charm for the author of the *Curiosities of Literature,* and he therefore devotes a chapter to the 'Titles of Books.' The foregoing are tempting subjects for the jumpers to conclusions, but some titles are impenetrable – what, for instance, can be made of *Labia Dormientum?* It turns out to be a Catalogue of rabbinical writers, and was so called in reference to a passage in *Solomon's Song,* 'Like the best wine for my beloved, that goeth down sweetly, causing *the lips of those that are asleep to speak'* (vii. 19).

In order to help the makers of Indexes in judging of the relative extent of the various letters of the Alphabet certain calculations have been made, but the statistics must vary greatly according to the character of the Index. Thus *B* is the largest in an Index of English names, but loses its pre-eminence in an Index of subjects, and *S* takes high rank in both classes.

Mr Curtis advocates in his paper[1] the arrangement under each initial letter according to the next following vowel, a plan often adopted in Locke's and other Common Place Books, but which is highly inconvenient, especially when words without a second vowel as *Ash* and *Epps* are placed at the head of each letter, as *Ash* before *Adam* and *Abel*; and *Epps* before *Ebenezer.*

In arranging entries in alphabetical order it is necessary to sort them up to the most minute difference of spelling. In order to save themselves trouble some workers think they may leave off sorting at the third letter, and their idleness gives others much annoyance. I have often been troubled in this way when consulting the Index to a large map of England in which the names of places are not arranged further than the third letter.

The Alphabetical arrangement has its difficulties which must be overcome ; for instance, it looks awkward when the plural comes before the singular, and the adjective before the substantive from which it is formed, as *naval* and *navies* before *navy*.

Another difficulty arises when names and words from a foreign language are introduced into an English index. The only safe rule in these cases is to use the English alphabet.

## Cross-references

Next in importance to the selection of appropriate headings in an index is the careful use of cross-references. Great judgment is here required, as the consulters are naturally irritated by being referred backwards and forwards, particularly in a large index. At the same time, if judiciously inserted, such references are a great help. When the entries are short and few, it is better to repeat them than to refer from one to the other. In the case of long entries cross-references are very advantageous, and it is always well to refer to cognate headings. This, however, must not be carried too far; for, as Mr Poole says in an article on his own index,[2] 'If every subject shall have cross-references to its allies, the work will be mainly a book of cross-references rather than an index of subjects.' He adds, 'One correspondent gives fifty-eight cross references under Mental Philosophy, and fifty-eight more might be added just as appropriate.'

At all events let the cross-references be real. In Eadie's *Dictionary of the Bible* (1850), there is a reference 'Dorcas see Tabitha,' but there is no entry under Tabitha at all.

No reference to a general heading without subdivision should be allowed. There are too many of these vague cross-references in the Penny Cyclopaedia, where you are referred from the known to the unknown. If a general heading be divided into sections, and each of these be clearly defined, they should be cross-referenced, but not otherwise. At present you may look for Pesth and be referred to Hungary, where probably there is much about Pesth, but you do not know where to look for it in the long article without clue. Sometimes cross-references are mere expedients, particularly in the case of a cyclopaedia published in volumes or numbers. Thus a writer agrees to contribute an article early in the alphabet, but is not ready in time for the publication of the part, so a cross-reference is inserted which sends the reader to a synonym later on in the alphabet. In certain cases this has been done two or three times. In Gobbett's *Woodlands* there is a good specimen of backwards and forwards cross-referencing. The author writes: 'Many years ago I wished to know whether I could raise birch trees from the seed …. I then looked into the great book of knowledge, the Encyclopaedia Britannica; there I found in the general dictionary:

BIRCH TREE. *See Betula* (Botany Index).

I hastened to BETULA with great eagerness and there I found:

BETULA. – See *Birch* Tree.

That was all, and this was pretty encouragement.'

Cross-referencing has its curiosities as well as other branches of our subject. Perhaps the most odd collection of cross-references are to be found in Hawkins's *Pleas of the Croim*, of which it was said in the *Monthly Magazine* for June, 1801 (p. 419), 'The author of the book and the writer of the index seem to be playing at cross purposes.' The following are some of the most amusing entries, but there are many more as good:

| | |
|---|---|
| Assault, *see* Son. | Farthing, *see* Halfpenny. |
| Cards, *see* Dice. | Fear, *see* Robbery. |
| Cattle, *see* Clergy. | Footway, *see* Nuisance. |
| Chastity, *see* Homicide. | Honour, *see* Constable. |
| Coin, *see* High Treason. | King, *see* Treason. |
| Convicts, *see* Clergy. | London, *see* Outlawry. |
| Death, *see* Appeal. | Shop, *see* Burglary. |
| Election, *see* Bribery. | Sickness, *see* Bail. |

The Index to Ford's *Handbook of Spain* contains an amusing reference:

Wellington, *see* Duke.

But perhaps the strangest place to find a cross-reference is on a tombstone. In Barnes churchyard the following inscription was put up to a once famous actor:

*Mr. J. Moody*
*A native of the Parish of Saint Clement Danes*
*and an old Member of Drury Lane Theatre.*
*For his Memoirs see the European Magazine; for his professional*
*abilities see Churchill's Rosciad.*
*Obiit Dec. 26 1812,*
*Anno AEtatis 85.*

## Note

## Acknowledgement