



# British Periodicals of the Victorian Age: Bibliographies and Indexes

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WRITING IN 1858, Wilkie Collins called his time "the age of periodicals."<sup>1</sup> Even a cursory comparison of the mid-Victorian journals, in quality and prestige, with those of the 1750's or the 1950's shows that Collins was right. The nineteenth century, especially from 1825 to 1900, was the golden age of the magazine and the review. The present century might be called, by contrast, the age of newspapers and of radio news. What the Victorians had, at both the level of the educated and the level of the "masses," was a body of quarterlies, monthlies, and weeklies which in part, sometimes large part, was concerned with the serious discussion of ideas, and which commanded a prestige unmatched today. Thomas Carlyle described the *Edinburgh Review* as "a kind of Delphic oracle and voice of the inspired for the great majority of what is called 'the intelligent public'." An old Lincolnshire squire assured Tennyson's father that next to the Bible the best thing one could read was the *Quarterly Review*. The monthlies—*Blackwood's*, *Fraser's*, the *Cornhill*, and others—were also read by "practical people, the trading interests, and the middle classes."<sup>2</sup> Moreover, every literary man of distinction, and many political leaders and ecclesiastics, including prime ministers and archbishops of Canterbury, as well as famous educators, scientists, philosophers, and historians, wrote for the reviews. Some of the outstanding books of the period—Carlyle's *Sartor Resartus*, for example, Arnold's *Culture and Anarchy*, and Huxley's *Science and Christian Tradition*—were simply essays, or chapters of a serial, reprinted from the Victorian journals. By the time that Poole brought out his great *Index to Periodical Literature* in 1882, he could say, in words that reinforce Collins's definition of the age, "The best writers and the great states-

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men of the world, where they formerly wrote a book or pamphlet, now contribute an article to a leading review or magazine, and it is read before the month is ended in every country in Europe. . . . Every question in literature, religion, politics, social science, political economy . . . finds its latest and freshest interpretation in the current periodicals.”<sup>3</sup>

If nothing like that could be claimed for the eighteenth century or the twentieth, what made it true of the nineteenth? The answer is suggested in a contemporary essay by Walter Bagehot called “The First Edinburgh Reviewers” (1855). “The modern man,” he said, “must be told what to think—shortly, no doubt—but he *must* be told it. The essay-like criticism of modern times is about the length which he likes.” Bagehot also meant that he wants to be told. The age of periodicals was the age of a growing democracy, political and social, in which it was felt that a much larger reading public, still with little education and little political experience, simply had to be guided; and not, of course, by the old aristocracy, but by the new “aristocracy of talent” which edited and wrote the reviews. At the same time these middle-class readers, for their part, were only too eager to attain the culture—or the veneer of culture—that the periodicals could provide. They had neither the training nor the time to read scholarly treatises. “Impatient of system, desirous of brevity, puzzled by formality,” they found “the review-like essay and the essay-like review” exactly to their taste.<sup>4</sup>

Moreover, it was also an age of rapidly changing and expanding knowledge, especially in the fields of science, history, and theology. People were confused by the mass of new facts and novel theories. They wanted to know the answers. And, to make the assistance of periodicals the more necessary, they were expected to know them—at any rate to give them. For everyone had to have an opinion on a score of disputed points in politics, religion, and morals. Not to do so was shameful: it implied indifference to crucial issues or failure to keep abreast of advancing knowledge. Surely anyone who was a person of importance, or professed to be (that is, any member of the middle class), ought to know where he stood on evolution or the Oxford Movement; what he thought of Carlyle or Mill; whether or not he believed in mesmerism or phrenology. He ought to have a theory of the universe and a view of human nature. “Old Leisure,” in the pre-Victorian days of the early century, “was quite a different personage,” as George Eliot described him in *Adam Bede*. “He was a

contemplative, rather stout gentleman . . . of quiet perceptions, undiseased by hypothesis; happy in his inability to know the causes of things, preferring the things themselves.”<sup>5</sup> His Victorian child or grandchild, on the other hand, is well represented by the “man of great gifts and requirements” [sic] with whom John Tyndall once walked down Regent Street, discussing various theological questions. “I could not accept his views,” Tyndall reported, “of the origin and destiny of the universe, nor was I prepared to enunciate any definite views of my own. He turned to me at length and said, ‘You surely must have a theory of the universe.’”<sup>6</sup> Faced with such expectations, one was doubly glad to have an answer ready, for himself as well as his friends.

The other side of the coin—the undermining of old established beliefs by the new developments, social and intellectual—has its bearing too on the prestige and authority of the journals. The age of periodicals was also the age of doubt, and for the Victorians doubt was painful and disturbing. They had grown up, by and large, with firm beliefs in the old order—Christian orthodoxy under the rule of church or chapel, and the political oligarchy of king and nobility. Suddenly the air was full of questions: Is true religion Christianity or is it Theism? and if Christianity, is the truth in the High Church? the Broad Church? the Low Church? Or if in none of them, which of the dissenting chapels has the pure faith of Christ? Or is every creed a delusion and nothing true but the blank materialism of “science”? In such a fluid and tense situation, every sect almost had its own periodical, reinforcing and bolstering its position, and readers turned to one or another, or to the general reviews, for the resolution, they hoped, of their religious doubts. To a lesser extent, the same situation existed in the political world. The French Revolution had ended the domination of the *ancien régime*, in both fact and theory, and spawned a long line of constitution-makers and reformers of society. At the same time the Industrial Revolution was creating complex problems, not only of the relations between “masters” and “men,” but of the degree of government interference, if any, in business and education. Tories, Whigs, and Radicals (democrats and Benthamites) had their respective reviews (the *Quarterly*, the *Edinburgh*, and the *Westminster* were the leading organs), and even smaller parties like the Chartists or the Christian Socialists had theirs, spreading the gospel; while worried citizens, perplexed by the pros and cons of trade unions or democracy or socialism, turned to them for guidance.

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This intellectual situation and the "essay-like review" are closely connected. When there was no longer any accepted body of beliefs, and men were wrestling painfully with a multitude of new facts and tentative theories, they saw truth in fragments—and wrote it in essays; and for readers, the very limitation of length, which allowed the writer, as Bagehot says, to avoid "analysing all difficulties, discussing all doubts," was entirely welcome: they wanted solutions and not deeper—and more confusing—analysis.<sup>7</sup>

From what has been said, the importance of the Victorian periodicals to the historian can scarcely be exaggerated. In scores of journals and thousands of articles he has a remarkable record of contemporary thought in every field, and a full range of opinion, from right to left, on every major question—a range far exceeding what he could find, in many cases, in what books were devoted to the topic being investigated, if any. Indeed, there are aspects of Victorian culture, minor ones, no doubt, but parts of the total picture, which simply do not exist in published books, or if they do, are entirely hidden from the scholar because there is no subject index to Victorian ideas and attitudes. (The only approximation to one, it turns out, is an index to periodical literature!) Also, reviews and magazines have the advantage, more than books, of reflecting the current situation, so that they are indispensable for the study of opinion at a given moment or in a short span of years.

If all this is true, the scholar must have at hand the indispensable tools for research. He must have bibliographies and indexes that can guide him through an enormous body of documents and throw a flash of light on the primary sources he must use in order to make the past meaningful. What is now available? What additional aids are needed?

So far as the periodicals themselves are concerned, the scholar has nearly all he could wish. In the *Union List of Serials in Libraries of the United States and Canada* (2nd ed. 1943, with supplements to 1949) and the fine *British Union-Catalogue of Periodicals . . . in British Libraries* (4 vols., 1955-1958), he has a fairly complete bibliography, as well as full information on the location of files. The arrangement in both is alphabetical. The *Tercentenary Handlist of English & Welsh Newspapers, Magazines, & Reviews*, published in 1920 by *The Times*, has the advantage of not being "controlled" by library holdings, and of an arrangement by initial date of publication, which shows what new journals were appearing in any year or span of years.

But as the title implies, Scotch and Irish periodicals have been omitted. W. S. Ward's *Index and Finding List of Serials Published in the British Isles, 1789-1832* (1953), is more complete than anything else, but its terminal date makes it of little value for Victorian studies. A second volume, from 1832 to 1900, would be very useful. Finally, there are the sections called "The Weekly Papers," "Magazines and Reviews," and "School and University Journalism" written by H. G. Pollard for Volume 3 of *The Cambridge Bibliography of English Literature*, edited by F. W. Bateson (1940). In this extensive list, covering all the periodicals a scholar would ordinarily need, changes of title and series are noted, and for each journal—a unique and valuable feature—the names of successive editors are given.

The arrangement is chronological by date of founding, but titles are included in the index to the whole work (vol. 4).

Though not a bibliography, strictly speaking, Walter Graham's *English Literary Periodicals* (1930) is a survey of the field which takes up so many magazines in short paragraphs or single sentences that it amounts, in fact, to a descriptive bibliography. The qualifying "literary" of the title is meant to exclude only scientific and scholarly journals, but the wide spread, from 1680 to 1930, makes the number of Victorian items relatively small. Another book that is also historical in form but of great bibliographical value, is R. D. Altick's *The English Common Reader* (1957). His two chapters on "Periodicals and Newspapers" are indispensable for the study of magazines aimed at what were called the "lower classes."

Bibliographies of books and articles about the periodicals are fewer and less satisfactory than those of the periodicals themselves. There are various lists of histories of journalism and publishing—most of them, however, concerned only with newspapers—and of memoirs and letters of proprietors and editors. None of them, however, is a critical list that would guide the scholar to the particular books he could use.<sup>9</sup> What is specially wanted here is an extensive bibliography arranged by journals, bringing together, under the head of each, all the relevant materials, primary and secondary, bearing on editors, publishers, policies, contributors, and readers. If such an organization, together with a section for books dealing with general considerations, each with a descriptive sentence or two, were to be adopted for a *Bibliography of Studies in Victorian Periodicals*, a major need of scholars would be supplied. As a matter of fact, Altick's section in the *Supplement*<sup>10</sup> to the *Cambridge Bibliography* is almost a perfect

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model, on a small scale, of what is wanted. It is also, in its own right, the best list there is of the latest research, and shows the emergence of a whole series of monographs in which individual periodicals are viewed as mirrors of the age, or of special political and religious groups. Francis Mineka's *The Dissidence of Dissent: The Monthly Repository, 1806-1838* (1944) may be cited as representative.

In the field of bibliography, another book, smaller than the one just outlined but of real value, would be a checklist of contemporary opinion. It would bring together articles like John Sterling's "The Periodical Press," Leslie Stephen's "The First Edinburgh Reviewers," or the survey of the principal journals in *Critic* for 1851 and 1852, and include chapters from memoirs (like that on the *Westminster Review* in Sir John Bowring's *Autobiographical Recollections*) as well as collateral discussions like Matthew Arnold's in "The Function of Criticism" and "The Literary Influence of Academies." Such a collection would provide the materials for an interesting study in cultural history—call it "The Victorian View of Periodical Literature."

Though only recently, nineteenth-century scholars have come to realize that the Victorian periodicals contain a mass of significant materials in all fields of study (art, economics, history, literature, philosophy, religion, and science) and form a rich source of historical knowledge—potentially. As it is, the source has scarcely been tapped for lack of adequate indexing, and the recurrent questions too often go unanswered: what did the Victorians think of China or Lamartine? what was the contemporary reaction to Mill's *Principles of Political Economy* or George Eliot's *Romola*? what articles did so-and-so write for the *Edinburgh* or *Fraser's*? who was the author of this anonymous review of *In Memoriam* or that anonymous article on paper currency? Most of these questions cannot be answered, except here and there, partly by accident, until an index, or indexes, to the leading periodicals which will cover subjects, authors, and books reviewed is possessed.

Something approaching that was the aim of the *Nineteenth Century Reader's Guide to Periodical Literature*, under the editorship of Helen Grant Cushing and Adah V. Morris. The plan was to move backward from 1900, a decade at a time; but after the first two volumes appeared in 1944, covering 1890-1899, the project was dropped. And in any case, the limited number of English journals that were included (only thirteen) and the reliance for the identification of anonymous authors

largely on a few publishers' lists that are available would have made this work, even if completed, somewhat short of ideal for students of England.<sup>11</sup>

The great index, of course, is Poole's; and it commands the admiration and respect of anyone who can remotely imagine the work involved or realize the tremendous value of a subject index to ninety British periodicals from 1802 to 1900. But it has its limitations: the year is not given, the volumes are numbered consecutively, disregarding series, the page citation is not inclusive. More serious, the subject headings are not standard, and the subject chosen is sometimes inappropriate because it has been adopted from a misleading title or running-title—which means, in effect, that the real subject in such cases is not indexed at all. Moreover, a number of journals of scholarly importance today are not covered: *The British Critic* (to which Newman, Keble, Pusey, and other High Churchmen contributed), W. J. Fox's Unitarian *Monthly Repository*, (which published articles by J. S. Mill and Harriet Martineau), *Meliora*, the first journal of sociology, and the Roman Catholic *Rambler*, edited by Lord Acton, are among the dozen or so unfortunate omissions.

Nevertheless, here is an answer to what the Victorians thought, and on large topics like China and Lamartine, one that is adequate for generalization. On smaller topics—say, Tibet or the concept of hell—it is less reliable because articles dealing with them may well have titles or running-titles of a broader character and will therefore appear—that is, will be concealed—in a long list of essays under "Asia" or "Travel" "Religion" or "Christianity"; and that may leave only a few, too few for generalization, under the topic itself. Someday, a new work, with a larger and more rigorous system of categories and a more liberal use of cross-references, will have to be prepared,<sup>12</sup> but for the time being, Poole will do well enough—as a subject index.

But that is all it is. For book reviews it is hopelessly inadequate. All short notices, though they may run to two or three pages, tens of thousands of them, are omitted; the sizeable reviews, which form separate articles, are placed sometimes under the subject, sometimes under the author; and, most unfortunate, unless the author's name or the title of the book being reviewed appears in the title or running-title of the article, the book will probably not be indexed at all. A major treatise like Mill's *Principles of Political Economy* will fare pretty well, with perhaps half of the reviews listed that appeared in the ninety

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periodicals, though placed under "Political Economy," not under "Mill." But criticism of a novel like *Romola*, which is often noticed with other books by other writers or by Eliot herself, is buried under such headings as "Fiction," "Novels," or "George Eliot." By name, Poole mentions exactly two reviews of *Romola*. It is obvious, therefore, that a comprehensive list of books reviewed, arranged by author and, where anonymous, by title (together with the identification of the author, wherever possible) is a major desideratum of periodical scholarship. Such an index is now being prepared in the Wellesley College Library, and will be published, eventually, as Volume 1 of *The Wellesley Index to Victorian Periodicals, 1824-1900*.<sup>13</sup>

Finally, for the names of the contributors, Poole is almost useless. What names he gives are placed, of course, under the subject listing of an article, and they amount to only about four or five per cent of the total. Here Poole was faced with an insurmountable obstacle. The almost universal custom of anonymity or of pseudonymity (including initials) in the Victorian journals means that perhaps only three per cent of the articles in the whole period are signed, and before 1870, closer to one per cent, if that many. The main reasons for this practice, so contrary to the procedure today, are the political nature of the early journals, which made them organs of a party and not a collection of individual opinions, and the claim that a reviewer, discussing a book written by a friend or a person in power, could be more candid and honest in both his criticism and his praise if his name were withheld. That he might also be irresponsible was a possibility only gradually emphasized as the century advanced.<sup>14</sup> But whatever the defense, the fact is that to track down the names of thousands of anonymous and pseudonymous writers requires an amount of time and a training in methods of scholarly research which Poole and his associates simply did not have. Most of the names they print, therefore, are the signatures to signed articles, which accounts at once for their low percentage. Moreover, where the identification was otherwise made, the evidence is not given and the attribution, therefore, cannot be checked—in itself a scholarly liability; and to make matters worse, many of the attributions are wrong, which in turn makes the scholar fearful of trusting those that are right. They are wrong because the compilers relied too confidently on marked files, which vary greatly, of course, depending on the marker and the degree of inside information he may have had. Much of the time, it would appear, the marker was guessing, perhaps shrewdly, perhaps wildly. Marked

files can be wonderfully helpful in suggesting hypothetical authorships, but the hypothesis in every case has to be checked, often a long procedure.

To rectify this major defect in Poole, *The Wellesley Index* has set out, in its second volume, to identify the anonymous and pseudonymous contributors to about fifty Victorian periodicals. Because the number of articles in the weeklies is astronomical and their brevity discourages republication (a fertile source for discovering the author), the project is limited, for the time being at any rate, to quarterlies and monthlies; and since the *Index* is intended primarily for intellectual historians, it is concerned only with critical essays, though the term is broadly interpreted as covering everything except poetry and "pure" fiction.

Within each periodical, arranged alphabetically from *Blackwood's* to the *Westminster*, each article will be listed chronologically. It will bear an item number, the title or running-title, inclusive pagination, the name of the author (most of the time, it is hoped), and the evidence for the attribution. This evidence is to be "factual" or objective. Characteristics of style or thought are always uncertain clues to authorship, and in any event require both careful reading and specialized knowledge of the particular writer, requisites one can scarcely command for so large a project. The evidence given will be roughly evaluated as "certain," "probable," or "possible." The volume will conclude with an "Index to Contributors," listing each man's essays by periodical initials and item number. This will mean that the scholar wishing to know what articles a particular author wrote, as well as the scholar wishing to know who wrote a particular article, will find what he wants, at least in theory, in Volume 2 of *The Wellesley Index*.

Broadly speaking, the problem of attribution can be attacked in two ways: The "direct" or "vertical" method focuses in turn on each periodical, looking for publishers' lists and marked files, exploring the correspondence of the editors and major contributors, much of it in manuscript in England, and examining all monographs and articles dealing with that particular journal. The "indirect" or "horizontal" method concentrates (1) on collections of essays (there must be several thousands listed in the *Cambridge Bibliography*) in which a given writer reprints his periodical contributions, quite often giving the sources in the preface or in footnotes;<sup>15</sup> (2) on such biographies and collections of letters, printed and in manuscript, as can be found

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for all known contributors—which turns out to be a rather high percentage because biography was so popular in the Victorian period that many minor figures, who today would receive only a memorial essay, could then command a large “Life and Letters”; and (3) on whatever bibliographies exist, either independently (like Mill’s of his own work or T. B. Smart’s of Matthew Arnold) or appended to standard lives.<sup>16</sup> The amount of research to be done is appalling if one thinks about it, but if he concentrates on a particular journal or a particular writer, and brings all of his knowledge and ingenuity into play, he can begin to fill in the names on the blank cards, with a sense of steady accomplishment.

Someone will ask, “Is it worth it? What does it matter whether or not we know the author of the essay on Athenian architecture in the *Edinburgh Review* for April 1852? All that matters is the essay itself as a mirror of contemporary opinion.” But this is not true. In the case of controversial essays (and that covers about 80 per cent of the materials), one can often make an intelligent interpretation only in the light of an author’s known position or of his other writings.<sup>17</sup> Moreover, the context in which one discusses a given article, and therefore its place in a work of scholarship, can be quite different once the author is known. Still further, the special value of the “Index to Contributors”—namely, that it will provide an extensive bibliography of the periodical writings of at least a thousand Victorians, including a good many articles that are not at present known to be by their authors—depends, of course, on these individual identifications. (If it is not important to know that the article on Athenian architecture was written by Coventry Patmore, it *is* important to know that Coventry Patmore wrote this article on Athenian architecture.) Finally, the fact that many Victorian books were first published as a series of periodical essays means that a book could be read, in its original form at least, in a library that had no copy of it, provided the library owned a file of the relevant periodical and this *Index*.<sup>18</sup>

When students and scholars have at hand not only Poole and the *Reader’s Guide* (for 1890-1899), but also *The Wellesley Index* (Volume 1 of which is scheduled for publication in 1965 and Volume 2 in 1967), they will not possess everything they could wish. They will still be able to dream of better Pooles and bigger Wellesley Indexes that will include the weeklies—and another fifty or so quarterlies and monthlies—just for good measure. But for nearly every question they will have sufficient clues to give a reasonable answer. They will be

able to understand more fully and interpret more wisely the "Age of Periodicals."

### *Bibliographical Notes*

1. Collins, Wilkie: *The Unknown Public. Household Words*, 18:222, 1858.
2. These quotations are taken from: Thompson, Denys: *A Hundred Years of the Higher Journalism. Scrutiny*, 4:25-26, June 1935. The third is by a contributor to *Blackwood's*.
3. *Poole's Index to Periodical Literature*. Boston, Houghton, Mifflin, 1882 edition, p. iv.
4. Bagehot, Walter: *Literary Studies*. 3 vols. London, 1898. Vol. 1, pp. 146-149. Cardinal Newman in "Christ upon the Waters" (1850), *Sermons Preached on Various Occasions*, London, 1898, p. 149, traces "the extreme influence of periodical publications at this day, quarterly, monthly, or daily" to the fact that they "teach the multitude of men what to think and what to say." This also bears on the paragraphs that follow.
5. Eliot, George: *Adam Bede*. Vol. 2, chap. 28, or in editions where the chapters are numbered consecutively, chap. 52.
6. Tyndall, John: *Fragments of Science*. 2 vols. New York, 1899, Vol. 2, pp. 98-99.
7. For the above paragraphs, the writer has drawn upon various passages in: Houghton, W. E.: *Victorian Frame of Mind, 1830-1870*. New Haven, Yale University Press, 1957, especially pp. 102-105.
8. Other bibliographies of British periodicals may be found in: Besterman, Theodore: *A World Bibliography of Bibliographies*. 3 vols., 1939-1940; 3rd ed. Geneva, Societas Bibliographica, 1955-1956. Vol. 3, 3003-3004, 3023-3024, 3094-3100.
9. The principal lists are by W. R. Credland and V. H. Rendall, *The Cambridge History of English Literature*. Edited by A. W. Ward and A. R. Waller. 15 vols. Cambridge, 1917. Vol. 14, 589-596; Graham, W. J.: *English Literary Periodicals*. New York, T. Nelson, 1930, pp. 394-402; and Pollard, H. G., *In: Cambridge Bibliography of English Literature*, just mentioned, Vol. 3, 782-792, brought up to date by R. D. Altick in the *Supplement*, Vol. 5, 1957, pp. 678-682.
10. *Supplement to the Cambridge Bibliography*, pp. 683-687. Pollard had used this format for a few journals in the main edition, Vol. 3, pp. 832-833.
11. Other indexes, except for Poole, which are discussed further, may be found in the *World Bibliography*, 3144-3148.
12. Stewart, Powell, and Sutherland, W. O. S., Jr.: Techniques for a Subject-Index of 18th-Century Journals. *The Library Chronicle of the University of Texas*, 5:6-15, Spring 1956. The writer understands that such an index is now being compiled, under the direction of Stewart and Sutherland, and that a copy of their "Subject Categories" may be obtained from the editors.
13. An early starting date was chosen because in the late twenties new ideas and new political movements were emerging that are characteristically Victorian. The specific date, 1824, is the year in which the important *Westminster Review* started publication.

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14. Maurer, Oscar, Jr.: Anonymity vs. Signature in Victorian Reviewing. *The University of Texas Studies in English*, 27:1-27, June 1948.

15. *The "A.L.A." Index*, that is, W. I. Fletcher's *Index to General Literature*, 1st ed., 1893; 2nd ed., Boston, Houghton-Mifflin, 1901, can be used for this purpose because an anonymous article, say on "Optimism," may appear there, under that topic, with a reference to the collection of essays where it was reprinted under the author's name.

16. Some attempt to identify some of the contributors to a few periodicals has been made: see the books and articles cited in the *Cambridge Bibliography*, Vol. 3, pp. 832-833, and Vol. 5, *Supplement*, pp. 684-687; and in addition, Fetter, F. W.: The Economic Articles in the *Quarterly Review* and Their Authors 1809-52. *Journal of Political Economy*, 66:47-64, 154-170, Feb.-April 1958.

17. Cf. a remark by F. W. Newman, *In: The Correspondence of Arthur Hugh Clough*. Edited by F. L. Mulhauser. 2 vols. Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1957, Vol. 1, p. 187. "So soon as I knew who Alpha was [i.e. Clough, who had used the pseudonym in a letter to the *Spectator*], his writing in many respects became modified to my understanding; for we inevitably interpret words by our previous knowledge of friends."

18. *The Wellesley Index* is being edited in the Wellesley College Library, Wellesley, Massachusetts, under the general direction of Walter E. Houghton, with the assistance of Eileen Curran of Colby College, Mrs. Esther Rhoads Houghton, and Michael Wolff of Indiana University, editors, and Mary Wallace and Mrs. Friscilla Coleman Ross, research assistants.

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