

Making the *OED*: Readers and Editors. A Critical Survey

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If there is one single image associated with the dictionary, it is that of the elderly James Murray in his Scriptorium, standing in front of shelves overflowing with slips. In one sense this is regrettable; while it properly represents Murray's enormous individual contribution, it obscures the significant part played by a large number of people who may never have visited the Scriptorium, or even met Murray face-to-face. It is the intention in this chapter to look more closely at the way in which their work was done, and the implications which this has for the project as a whole.

In considering the question of readers, subeditors, and editors there is one key fact to be borne in mind: the typical contributor was an unpaid volunteer who was not only working 'out-of-house', but was in fact often living at a considerable geographical distance, with instruction and comment being supplied largely through the written word. In this context, it is worth noting the final sentence of Henry Bradley's Prefatory Note to Volume IV:

My removal to Oxford, which took place in the middle of 1896, has, by enabling me to confer with my assistants personally instead of by correspondence, materially facilitated my work, and the results are already visible in the greatly increased rapidity with which the copy has been produced. (1901: p. viii)

What was involved in the initial work? To begin with, there was a mass of raw material with which those engaged in the editorial process had to deal. The reading programme for the dictionary produced boxes and bundles of 5×3 slips of paper, each slip bearing an illustrative quotation for a word or phrase, together with the citation details of the source from which it was taken. The word or phrase illustrated (the 'catchword') was written in the top left-hand corner of the slip. When Murray took over in 1879 he continued and extended the collection of material, and in years to come he was clear that it was largely the material collected under his direction which had been of real value to the dictionary. A letter of 1899 looks back to the early years of the reading programme:

There are numberless puzzles about the early history of the Philological Society's materials which I have long despaired of unravelling, contenting myself with doing the best possible with the materials since they came into my custody . . . the original materials are bad enough, and rarely to be trusted, and, in point of fact, 5/6 of the quotations that we print, are taken from those collected under my supervision since 1879 . . . A very small proportion of the Dictionary is composed of 'materials collected by the Phil. Soc.' . . . I often wish I had made a bonfire of the old and begun anew. (OED/MISC/13/24)

Some allowance must be made for Murray's tendency to doubt the probity of systems other than his own, but it seems likely that his estimate was a just one. The original readers, once assigned their tasks, had little or no supervision or feedback on results. In consequence it is inevitable that even those who did not fall by the wayside would have developed considerable variance in the material they produced. Murray's often cited anxiety to control and oversee the whole work may well thus have sprung from his awareness of the necessity to correct 'stylistic drift' by constantly reiterating essential principles. He was also aware of how common it was to lose readers and subeditors; an enthusiastic beginning was not necessarily followed by sustained progress.

In the essential structure of the project, Murray was at the centre, accompanied (at first in Mill Hill and later in Oxford) by a small number of assistants who worked with him preparing text for the press and revising proofs. Volunteer readers sent in batches of slips for various vocabulary items; these had to be alphabetized, and ranges of work made up for the initial work ('subediting'). Batches of slips were sent out for the first editorial work, and in due course drafted entries came back. These were stored until it was time for the next round when they were sent out again, together with all the new material for the range which had been amassed in the meantime. From 1896, when Bradley arrived in Oxford, a second centre for the dictionary was established at the Old Ashmolean; there was then necessarily a degree of communication between the two groups, as well as between each group and its outside workers.

The material would be revised by the 're-subeditor', and once more the finished work would come back. Finally the point would be reached at which it was necessary for a range to be prepared for the Press, and it was only then that the editor himself (i.e. Murray, Bradley, or later, Onions and Craigie) was likely to inspect the work. There was, moreover, a considerable time-lag between material arriving at Oxford and its being worked on by in-house subeditors; another disadvantage when dealing with those who were geographically remote. It was in fact not unusual for the same subeditor to work twice through the same material before it reached the editor's hands. For example, James Bartlett subedited the material for G twice, first in 1888 (and the immediately following years) and again in 1897-8, a great many additional quotations having accumulated in the interim. It was also quite possible that by the time the text had reached the proof stage the original subeditors would no longer be alive. A paragraph from Bradley's

Preface to M shows that four out of six named subeditors had died before the volume appeared. Similarly, in his Preface to Volume VII (1909), Murray paid tribute to 'the generous and, in many cases, long-continued services of these voluntary contributors, so few of whom, alas! survive'.

The respective roles of subeditors and re-subeditors, especially in relation to Murray himself, are clearly indicated in the Prefatory Note to Part II, *Ant-Batten*. As well as assistants in the Scriptorium, Murray had the help of several voluntary outside workers. Alfred Erlebach (before becoming an in-house assistant) had subedited *Au-Az*. The Revd Arthur P. Fayers, of Rawdon, near Leeds, had subedited part of *Bap-* as well as the section from *Bath-* onwards. G. A. Schrumpf had spent several weeks on the first draft of the word *At*, and W. J. Ashley, of Lincoln College, Oxford, had subedited *Bar* and its derivatives. From *As-* onwards the remainder of the material, having first been put into shape by in-house assistants, had been 'carefully revised, amended, and extended' by C. B. Mount of Oxford, Dr Brackebusch of London, and E. Gunthorpe of Sheffield. These three volunteers were singled out for special praise:

[They] have kindly brought the experience gained in sub-editing other portions of the materials to the task of taking those already sub-edited, incorporating therewith the latest additions, revising the subeditors' discrimination and arrangement of the senses, and contributing generally to the ultimate form of the articles, immediately in advance of my own final work for the press. (Murray 1885: p. v)

It was of course of crucial importance that the written instructions supplied should be as detailed as possible. There are various manuscript copies of 'Directions to SubEditors', which set out what was to be done with the material, beginning with the essential task of arranging the slips in alphabetical order of catchword. Even this was not necessarily straightforward. The catchword should be ordered in accordance with the 'typical form' (that is, what was recognized as the dominant spelling) of the word, rather than with the actual spelling on the slip. It was thus necessary, after the first sort, to look again for any catchwords representing an obsolete form, and to resort these slips to their proper place. While doing this, the subeditor was also expected to make cross-references from the obsolete to the typical form: 'Insert blank slips bearing the obsolete form as a catchword, in the places whence you remove the others, with a cross-reference to the "Typical Form"', state the instructions (OED/MISC/91/9); 'thus, in the place whence you have removed the slips for *Abricock*, insert a blank slip, bearing "*Abricock* obs. f. *Apricot*"'. Once this had been done, the real work could begin. 'Your slips are now in homographic groups', the editor encouraged; 'i.e. groups of words identical in spelling, but perhaps really consisting of several distinct parts of speech, or even of words having no connexion' (OED/MISC/91/9). It was, however, possibly less than helpful that this use of *homographic* to mean 'of, belonging to, or consisting of homographs' was apparently Murray's own coinage: this remains the first and only illustrative quotation for this sense in the *OED*.

Division into parts of speech was the next step; slips for *pale*, for example, had to be divided according to whether they illustrated noun, adjective, or verb. Afterwards the slips were arranged by date for each word, although there was at this point a specific warning against attempting to clarify the meanings. Each word was given an initial blank slip on which was to be written the typical form of the catchword, and a list of historical forms of the word in chronological order. Semantic analysis now began, with quotations for each word being classified according to meaning and construction. Subeditors were to make these divisions as precisely as possible, with the help of whatever dictionaries they might have to hand. The subeditor had then to arrange, in chronological order, all the slips illustrating each meaning and construction. It is clear that here the purpose of the work was to prepare the material for more expert hands: 'Write . . . a provisional definition, at least, for the Editor's revisal; arrange their meanings in logical order—your earliest quotations will generally, but not always, contain the original English meaning' (OED/MISC/91/9).

All slips for phrases were to be placed after the word or sense to which the phrase was assigned. Slips for compounds or combinations of a word, however, were placed in a batch at the end of that word, where the editor could most readily find them. This outline is in principle the pattern familiar from the printed text of the *OED*, although at this stage it was still being assumed that phrases would be assignable to individual senses. In practice, this did not always prove possible; some words therefore required separate paragraphs in which phrases could be grouped as a set. Subeditors were to make every effort to complete the illustrative quotations for each sense, although it was recognized that at times the material might be lacking. 'You may not be able to accomplish all these steps', the directions acknowledge (OED/MISC/91/9). Nevertheless 'kindly pursue them in order, and do as much as you can, endeavouring to return the work to the Editor in as advanced a state as possible, and above all, *in complete order as far as it has gone*.'

The 'Directions to Editors' chronicle the initial stage of editing. It is notable that each stage involves work with slips, but evidence from the *OED* archives suggests (unsurprisingly) that subeditors were also likely to draw up plans for the semantic divisions of longer words. Thus Miss J. E. A. Brown, who subedited *Bel-Betrust*, drew up a plan on a sheet of foolscap paper dividing the verb *bereave* into eight main senses with six further subsenses. As eventually published it had three main senses and three subsenses, the remainder of Miss Brown's divisions being taken as contextual examples of a broader sense. Similarly, Dr Brackebusch, working on the adjective *bad*, drew up a plan requiring twenty-six senses (the final article had eight). As this illustrates, it was a danger for subeditors working in isolation that they would see semantic divisions in what were actually only contextual uses. This could of course be corrected at the next stage, or by the in-house subeditor, but at the cost of some time spent on rearrangement. It is in the light of the frustration occasioned by this that we may consider some tart comments made by Henry Bradley on notes by James Bartlett.

[BARTLETT] I prefer to leave these to a more skilled hand.

[BRADLEY] You should have left it *all*. (OED/OS/168/6/4)

[BARTLETT ON *monad*] I have tried very hard to grapple with this difficult word, but have found so many of its uses too obscure to discriminate and discuss that I very reluctantly let them *severely* alone.

[BRADLEY] good! (OED/OS/168/6/2)

The verb *shake* presented particular difficulties:

[BARTLETT] I feel quite incompetent to tackle the formidable early forms of the word, and so leave them alone. Also the numbering off.

[BRADLEY] I move to delete all after 'incompetent'. (OED/OS/242/9/2)

The second, or revision, stage (similarly laid out in 'Directions to Re-subeditors') also took place out-of-house and at a distance, although at this point there was more expectation that the editor would soon be looking at the material. The first priority here was to deal with new slips, which had to be arranged and treated according to the rules laid down for the first editing stage. It was now that the impact of the new material on the primary editing had to be assessed, and any necessary modifications made to the list of historical forms and dates. It was also possible that a new form might emerge which was alphabetically widely separated from the typical form. In such cases, a cross-reference was to be made on a blank slip and, if this fell outside the range being dealt with, it was to be returned to the editor for insertion in the proper place. (It is noted explicitly that cross-referencing for forms already recorded would have been done by the previous subeditor.) The re-subeditor now embarked on subediting proper with the instruction, 'Read through the subeditor's definitions, and master his plan of the word.' Having done so, the new material was incorporated, with new slips being inserted at the appropriate semantic and chronological points. Further alterations and emendations might also be necessary if, for example, the new evidence (or the re-subeditor's own observation) suggested that definitions should be modified or senses rearranged; suggestions for changes were to be written on the blank slips left by the previous subeditor in front of each section.

The directions at this stage give us a picture of second-stage editing in which re-subeditors might alter what the original subeditor had done. They were, however, explicitly not encouraged to do anything which would hinder the editor's seeing the original plan. Materials for the entry could be assembled in as up-to-date a manner as possible, but where defining is concerned, there is a clear implication that the final version was to be the responsibility of the editor. This stage-by-stage sifting may well have ensured that each word received the most thoughtful consideration. It is nevertheless clearly not a procedure geared to speed. It is also worth noting that there is no suggestion that when new quotations were added, older quotations should be removed.

We may at this point give some consideration to the actual numbers involved. In the Preface to Volume I, Murray gave some significant figures. More than 800

readers had responded to the new appeal made in 1879; while most of them were from Great Britain, a large number were from the United States, and there were also volunteer readers in British colonies and foreign countries. Over three years, their efforts provided a million additional quotations. As far as the editing was concerned, over the course of the volume Murray had a total of twelve in-house editorial assistants: Alfred Erlebach, John Mitchell, James B. Johnston, G. F. H. Sykes, F. E. Bumby, Walter Worrall, A. T. Maling, R. H. Lord, C. G. Balk, H. F. P. Ruthven, C. G. Crump, and G. Parker. As well as these there were 'about thirty subeditors (including a few who had never ceased to work for the Dictionary)' who 'offered their gratuitous services in arranging quotations, preparing definitions, and otherwise contributing to the execution of the work' (Murray 1888: p. vi).

The numbers involved illuminate what were to be two constant factors: the essential support provided by (in the main voluntary) outside workers, and the considerable input of editorial time required to train them in the requisite skills and to establish and maintain an acceptable quality in their output. Instructions to subeditors and re-subeditors assume an orderly progression (although it is clear from the outset that the requirement for the editor to make all final decisions was likely to result in a serious bottleneck). However, some subeditors were less reliable than might have been hoped. An early letter from Murray to a dilatory contributor (MP/25/10/1881) notes, for instance, that failure to send material in as agreed had been a serious hindrance. Arrangements had been made for its receipt and a letter of remonstrance had been ignored. The contributor was firmly requested to send off the slips immediately, without further waste of the editor's time.

There could also be friction between the editors themselves. In November 1901 Bradley wrote to Murray requesting that the Scriptorium staff be asked not to make unauthorized alterations in his copy, and pointing out that remedying such unwanted contributions resulted in expenditure of time. On 21 November he wrote again. He began by apologizing for not having realized that the particular alteration of which he had complained was made according to a general rule rather than having been an arbitrary decision on the part of Murray's assistant, Mr Sewell. However, he was still unhappy with the general situation:

My assistants have often called my attention to instances in which the text of a quotation has been altered at the Scriptorium to a form in which the word illustrated did not occur at all. Mr Worrall says that this has happened with quotes from 1611 Bible which have been put back to Wyclif. (MP/21/11/1901)

Bradley went on to give details of the way in which he preferred to work, his comments indicative of the manner in which the work of readers, and perhaps also of primary subeditors, was regarded: 'Whenever I do a word from the beginning I always (barring oversight) look up the passage, as the sense is seldom securely established by the quot[ation]s as sent by our readers'. As he admitted, there were nevertheless a number of texts for which this was impossible:

As we have no b-text Chaucer, and our means of verifying quotes from Gavin Douglas are inferior to yours, we must continue to rely on the Scriptorium for corrections of text in quotes from these two authors. But in the case of the Bible, Shaks., Milton, Malory, Cursor, Langland, etc., my assistants ought to be responsible for the text of quotes, leaving only the references to the Scriptorium staff. (MP/21/11/1901)

Murray had evidently raised another question about the material sent to the Scriptorium since Bradley moved on to defend his numbering of the slips, a practice adopted, he stressed, 'because portions of copy were constantly getting lost at the Scriptorium'. Murray's reply accepted Bradley's suggestions for dealing with sources. The notion of even one missing slip, however, was another matter:

We are surprised to be told that 'portions of copy were constantly getting lost at the Scriptorium'. So far as any one here can remember, this is the first time we ever heard of such an irregularity, and, frankly, *we believe it impossible*. There are no holes in the Scriptorium floor through which such portions could slip, and as every table is cleared from time to time, and every stray slip found put into its place . . . it is to us so inconceivable as to be utterly impossible, that even a single slip could be permanently lost. I believe I have lost or mislaid only *two* slips since the Dictionary began in 1879; one of those which I mourned for years and years, and spent hours in looking for, turned up a few weeks ago under *ocean* to which it had been sent from *charnel*, when not used there. (MP/?22/11/1901)

The question of disappearing copy caused something of a storm since, according to Bradley's letter of 25 November, the Scriptorium assistant C. G. Balk assumed that Bradley was suggesting that copy had been 'deliberately caused to disappear'. Balk evidently apologized for this assertion in a courteous and friendly letter; however, he 'unfortunately followed it . . . with another letter which I much regret, as I think the writer himself probably will when in a calmer mood'. Bradley sensibly did not allow himself to be drawn into a discussion of Scriptorium methods of text-management; he did, however, allow himself a bland comment on Murray's claim: 'A system of arrangements so perfect in method that accidental disappearance of slips is *impossible* is unfortunately so far out of my experience that it did not occur to me to regard the alleged fact as proving even gross carelessness, far less anything worse' (MP/25/11/1901).

This exchange is one of particular interest in the light it throws on relations between the two groups of lexicographers, each struggling to deal with a flood of slips and galley proofs, and each somewhat doubtful of the accuracy and carefulness of the other. It also highlights another constant: the desire to recheck for oneself the work done by another. Over the years this constituted one of the major obstacles to progress.

In the Preface to Volume I, Murray took occasion to render particular thanks to those contributors whose work was the systematic and continuous critical reading of proofs 'to improve the work as a whole by criticism, or to enrich it by additions' (1888: p. xiii). Pre-eminent among these gentlemen (who included Henry Hucks Gibbs, later Lord Aldenham, and Murray's one-time editorial assistant James

B. Johnston), was 'Mr. Fitzedward Hall, DCL, who, as a voluntary and gratuitous service to the history of the English Language, has devoted four hours daily to a critical examination of the proof-sheets'. Unlike, for instance, the Broadmoor patient Dr Minor, who began and remained as a reader supplying quotations from chosen texts (see Knowles 1990), Hall's crucial role was that of a critical reader of the proofs; he was thus able to contribute to any part of an entry. The long and detailed correspondence between Murray and Hall hence serves to shed light on many of the staples of the editing process. (It should be remembered that while the main connection was with Murray, Hall also read proofs for Bradley: his work is acknowledged in Bradley's Prefatory Note to *E-Every*.)

In the last quarter of the nineteenth century, the American-born Fitzedward Hall was living a semi-reclusive life in Wickham Market, Norfolk. He had originally come to London from India, but in 1869 he was dismissed from the India Office, by his own account on the (unfounded) charge of being both a hopeless drunkard and a foreign spy. He was and remained convinced that his nationality opened him to the enmity with which he believed Americans were regarded by the English. Hall had sufficient private means on which to live, and he and his family left London for East Anglia. A few years later his marriage broke up, and after this he effectively lived the life of a recluse. His life, in fact, largely became his work for the dictionary. Four hours a day were spent on proofs; for much of the rest of time, he was reading for vocabulary. 'You may depend upon me to the last gasp', he had written in 1897, and this seems to have been literally true; according to his son, the last time Hall held a pen was when, on the day before his death, he signed a dictated postcard to accompany the proof sheets he was returning. Although they never actually met, through their letters he and Murray became friends; 'I grieve more than ever that I never saw him face to face nor grasped his honoured hand', Murray lamented when Hall died in 1901 (OED/MISC/13/31).

Though it is a matter of regret that while Murray's letters to Hall focus on lexicographical matters, Hall's surviving letters in the Murray Papers are largely those which deal with personal health and circumstances, the material which is preserved in this correspondence, and the information we have about Hall's work for the dictionary does serve to provide unique details about the kind of work done by long-time contributors. Murray's appreciation of Hall's work was clear. He warmly praised 'the daily and never-to-be-forgotten labours which you have so generously and splendidly performed for the Dictionary'. This 'rises before me as one of the most splendid records of disinterested work in the annals of literature', he added, 'not its least wonderful feature being the sustainment of interest and work for long years' (OED/MISC/13/4). When in December 1893 he heard that Hall was ill, he was concerned both personally and professionally:

The everyday wish which I have from visitors to the Scriptorium, or correspondents on the subject of the Dictionary is 'May you live to see Zymotic': that wish, I most heartily

transfer to you, for I really dread to think of the falling-off in our work, which the failure of your help would mean. It is true that you have spoken of leaving materials at my disposal, but alas! how little worth are the best materials without the master-mind that knows how to use them, and make them useful! (OED/MISC/13/4)

The friendship between them moreover meant that Hall was treated as a confidant, to whom accounts of general anxieties and worries could be addressed. The autumn of 1895 was, for instance, a time of particular pressure:

For the last 12 months, since Mr Mitchell lost his life in Wales in the end of Augt. 1894, I have lived in a kind of chronic fever of excitement arising from anxiety to go on, & the constantly retarding & chafing influence of insufficient and inefficient help. Every day has found me short of what I hoped to do, & nearly every day has brought unforeseen and worrying causes of delay, from the omissions & inaccuracies of new assistants not observed in their initial stage. (OED/MISC/13/12)

When such errors were observed, it often took longer to correct the mistakes; another reason, Murray explained, why he had not personally written to Hall for some time. At other times Murray wrote of the difficulties he experienced in writing the dictionary, though he was equally appreciative of Hall's own labours towards this work. 'I have been reduced almost to the state of a machine, grinding out "copy", & have hardly had an instant for thought, or any brain-power to entertain it', he commented on the strain of finishing D, adding: 'I am afraid the 3 proofs a week must have a terrible strain on *you*; it was so, for some of my "readers" who do not bestow on the pages a little of the labour & time that you do... I have to record with deepest gratitude our obligations to you for your superb help, which has so enriched the 3 volumes now finished, and to express with trembling the earnest desire that you will be able to give us your help for a long time to come' (OED/MISC/13/16).

Hall's main function was that of providing critical comment at proof stage, and a number of the letters record detailed discussions about individual words. In November 1894, for example, Murray wrote to thank him for the 'wealth of material sent for Develop'—a word which had already 'cost a great deal of trouble in MS'. Hall had obviously supplied a good many further quotations which were of particular value for semantic analysis as well as linguistic history:

What is printed represents a fourth or fifth of the quots. merely; but those left out were mostly of this century, while yours carry several shades of meaning back to last century. The essential meaning of those you pin together seems to me to be 'unfold', but it certainly approaches or quite comes to 'discover, detect' in some cases. Of course 'discover' is *literally* the same thing, except that in *discovering* you may have simply to *lift* a cover, whereas in *developing* the cover has to be *unrolled* or *unwound*—but the result is the same, the contents lie bare—and hence in fig. senses the two words coincide. (OED/MISC/13/7)

Hall regularly dealt with items of core vocabulary such as *develop*, though his contributions could be equally useful for loanwords too. Murray, for example,

thanked him for his assistance with *Devanagari*, the name of the alphabet used for Sanskrit, Hindi, and other Indian languages, and 'on the very verge of the province of an English Dictionary' (OED/MISC/13/7). Hall's comments on the entry for *devilry* were significant in other ways, here presumably causing a new entry to be introduced. 'I took *deviltre* to be a misprint for *devilrie*. The interchange of *r* and *t* is very frequent: we have had series of instances since we began', Murray admitted in response to Hall's corrections: 'I think your suggestion as to *deviltry* being East Anglian is very likely correct' (OED/MISC/13/9). Hall's comments on spelling could also be of influence: 'My old assistant Mr Erlebach who came to give me a little help in my pressure at Xmas, has an article I believe in type for some magazine in some points of spelling, where these words are touched on', Murray wrote: 'I have told him that you rather doubted *diagraming*, and he asked today for your address that he may submit his article to your kindly criticism' (OED/MISC/13/10). Here Hall was presumably persuaded by the arguments; the entry for *diagram* gives the inflections as *diagramed* and *diagraming*. Advice on pronunciation was also requested, as on *diaskeuast* for which Murray set out the various possibilities for Hall's opinion in 1895 (OED/MISC/13/11).

By the spring Murray was well launched on H, writing to Hall in early April about the entry for *hand*, and asking him to send only what struck him as needed to supply omissions or correct error. *Handsome* was also presenting difficulties, and the suggestion was made that Hall might draft and send a definition. By the summer, they had reached *He*—. A letter of 28 July, dealing with the pronoun *he*, provides an interesting example of detailed requests for illustrative quotations:

We want good instances

- 1 Of *he* applied to mountains, rivers, rocks, &c personified.
- 2 Of *he* pleonastic in ballad style—the noble Percy *he*—and in modern illiterate use 'my father *he* is called Billy'
- 3 Of *he that* and *he who*, so as to date the appearance of the latter
- 4 Of *he* with prep. l phrase, as 'he of Macedon', 'he of the sevenfold shield', 'he with the wooden leg'. Cf 'there stood *she* of Medici, the stateliest of the line'
- 5 Of *He who* meaning *one who*, *any one who*. (I think we have enough of *he* meaning man, male, and *he*— in *he-goat*, *he-saint*, *he-fellow*.) (OED/MISC/13/18)

Hall continued to supply quotations as well as reading proofs, as a letter of October 1897 confirms (while also throwing an interesting light on the 'perfect system' of whose existence Henry Bradley had been so doubtful): 'In some mysterious way we have lost the enclosed quots. which you appear to have sent with the accompanying Proof... I thought our systematic method rendered any such vanishing impossible' (OED/MISC/13/20). H, like D, represented final editing, but further down the alphabet the first subediting stages were still in progress; here too Hall was involved. On 22 September 1898 Murray wrote to say that he had got the *photo*- words for the volunteer subeditor dealing with that part of P, and was sending Hall particulars of what would be useful. He was particularly appreciative that Hall should be prepared to do this while still embroiled with H; *how*

especially had been difficult for both of them. It was, of course, said Murray, a difficult article, and one in which perfection lay far off.

Hall's work could also bring to light the problem of inadequately-read sources, and the need to supplement them. 'You have doubtless observed of late that you have had to supply numerous references to quotes. from Davies *Athenae Brit[annicae]*', Murray wrote, for example: 'our own quotes. from the work seem to have stopped' (OED/MISC/13/23). The letter went on to describe and castigate 'the silly practice' encouraged by Furnivall, by which volunteers had been encouraged to collect vocabulary only for the letters on which they were themselves engaged, being 'urged to get their friends to read books for *their own letters* only—so as to provoke a rivalry of good works between them, the fatal result being that *I* never know whether a book reported as read was read as a whole or not, until some accident recalls the fact that of late we have not seen any quotes. from the book in question'. This letter is particularly significant because it not only sets out the problem but also (with due regard to constraints of time and budget) proposes a solution. If, Murray suggested, Hall's references to the relevant work were to hand in accessible form, they could be copied out onto blank slips, and someone could be employed to copy out the actual quotations in the Bodleian Library in Oxford. This 'would be much cheaper than turning them up once or twice a week during the next 10 or 12 years, necessitating a journey every time, the ordering of the book, etc.' (OED/MISC/13/23). The initial copying out, he suggested, should be done by someone found by Hall (though paid by Murray). It is especially noteworthy here that Murray was confident that Hall's choice of words would be acceptable—a marked contrast to his views of the wordlists supplied by the Broadmoor patient Dr Minor. When, a few years later, Murray was getting quotations from books indexed by Minor, he warned the chosen reader, John J. Thompson, that Minor's lists were more numerous than was needed; he even suggested that it might be easier for Thompson simply to reread the book for himself.

By 1900 Hall was in fact nearing the end of his life, and it is evident from Murray's last letters to him that Hall's physical capabilities were weakening. Murray wrote to ask 'whether we can do anything to help you, whether there is any mechanical work, copying, or combining lists, which could be done for you *here*, or under your superintendence by young people there; if there is, we could afford to pay for it as clerkly work, & should be glad to do so' (OED/MISC/13/28). The letter also suggests, however, that Hall was becoming less conscious of the publishing schedule, and of the necessity to restrict the number of corrections in proof. 'I am not able to use nearly all the quotes. that you so kindly send: perhaps you could restrict the number sent to those which you think absolutely needed as being earlier or later than, or different from those we have', Murray suggested: 'The fact, that a quotation is *better* than one we have, cannot always be taken advantage of to substitute it. We send to printer the *best we have*, and to these in the main we must stick, except where the superiority of others that come in later is very great indeed.'

Murray's last letters to his long-time contributor were written in this year; Hall died in February 1901. The aim was then to make use of the materials left behind, a process recorded in an exchange of letters between Murray and Hall's son, Richard. What becomes clear from this correspondence is that whatever instructions he may have received from Murray, Hall had in fact worked to his own system, rather than to one directed from Oxford. Those dealing with his papers had not only to find the material they believed to exist but also, if possible, to reconstruct the system by which he had worked. The problem was one only too likely to arise in the case of a long-time contributor who had always worked at a distance, and who had in the main been treated as a collaborator rather than as a subordinate.

The first difficulty related to missing material. Murray wrote to thank the younger Hall for a package of quotations, but pointed out that there should be more to be found. There should have been a 'mass' of material from the end of J; evidence from Hall's favourite books and authors were also missing from K and L. 'We have little doubt that there is somewhere another series of slips, or if not, a series of note-books containing references from which he used to get his quotations, turning up the actual passages, & copying them out probably from his library', Murray concluded (OED/MISC/13/32). Additional information appeared the next day: 'We have just found among the L materials sent us, these Index-lists of words, which seem to belong to some book or collection of quotations' (OED/MISC/13/33); 'I send them', said Murray, 'in the hope that they may suggest something to you.'

This provided an outline of Hall's method: the systematic indexing of chosen books whereby words and page references were recorded in vocabulary lists. There were also unexplained annotations: references to unidentifiable sources indicated by 'My 1' and 'My 2' against particular items in the wordlists. While it was clear that such annotations formed an integral part of Hall's system, it was and remains impossible to deduce their meaning. Hall's index lists, or 'analyses of books', turned out to be much more extensive than Murray had expected: 'When we remember that they would probably have taken him, had he lived, 4 hrs a day during the next 10 years, or some 12,000 hours, it is evident we shall in some way have to expend *more* than that number of hours upon putting them in order, & taking out the quotations' (OED/MISC/13/37).

The solution, Murray thought, was a general appeal for volunteers on the lines of the 1879 'Appeal to the English-speaking World'. This was in fact done, as Murray later informed Hall's son:

In accordance with a paragraph which the Sec[retary] of the Philological Society inserted in some of the London papers, a large number of persons have written to me offering to copy out the passages to which your father left references in the papers which you sent us, providing I can send the books to them to be excerpted. You kindly offered to lend us such of the books as we might wish to have for the purpose; I send you accordingly a list of the books which I should at present like to borrow to be thus excerpted. (OED/MISC/13/37)

Correspondence about Fitzedward Hall's books continued between Murray and Richard Hall throughout the summer. In Oxford, going through Hall's papers, they were effectively reconstructing a list of Hall's major sources, and if possible identifying the actual edition from which Hall had worked. This was not always easy. Richard Hall's surmise of 'the vol. of La Primaudaye's *French Academy*' was correct for one source, for example, but 'it is not the part wanted, which is part III of date 1618. We do not know that Dr Hall had it, but there is a pencil list for it. Apparently it is bound up with something else, prob. a later edn. of the whole work' (OED/MISC/13/43). Only thirteen citations appear in the OED for the third part of *French Academy*, so it is possible that here Hall's copy was not traced and his index not used.

Another mystery, however, was at least partly solved. 'The mysterious references to *My 1*, *My 2*, etc., on which we could get no light before, receive some illumination', Murray wrote in the same letter; 'On the list belonging to W. Watson's *Decacordon* there is a note "See also my Vol 4 of words." Hence it is evident that there is somewhere a (MS.) book of words in 4 volumes at least, whence those in *My 1* etc. were extracted.' These would, he concluded optimistically, 'certainly come to light somewhere, & somewhen'. (There is regrettably no record of whether this happened.)

At this point examination of another archive source is relevant; a collection of letters written by Murray to John J. Thompson, one of the volunteer readers who was to help with excerpting Hall's books. This correspondence moreover provides an excellent illustration of Murray's preference for keeping things in his own hands rather than delegating the work to an assistant. Despite the enormous pressure under which he was working, Murray provided the initial brief, continued to conduct the correspondence, and to supervise the work.

In June 1901 he wrote to Thompson, enclosing a book of Hall's together with blank quotation slips. His instructions were explicit: Thompson was to take quotations for all the words after J in the enclosed pencil list, being careful to ensure that references were accurately given, and that quotations were long enough to be clear and grammatical. Murray also offered, if more slips were needed, to send blanks which could be filled up with date and title. The excerpting was a success, Murray thanking him in early July for the 'excellent' material, and adding that he would gladly send another book as soon as he got one. As he explained, Richard Hall had difficulty identifying the particular edition wanted so the necessary books tended to reach him piecemeal. Murray suggested another source, asking whether Thompson had used Dr Williams's Library [which] 'contains many books for which Dr F. Hall made indices, tho' he had not the book of his own' (OED/MISC/11/9). He recommended a specific title (Richard Montagu's *Diatribae upon the first part of the late History of Tithes*, 1621), which he wanted read for words in K–Z. He would get the slips printed and send Hall's wordlist.

Arrangements for access to Dr Williams's Library initially proved more difficult than Murray had hoped, but in the meantime another book came to light: Richard Brathwait's *Strappado* (1615). Murray said that he was ordering 500 slips

to be printed which would 'give approximately 2 quots. to a page although it would of course have been capable of yielding many more' (OED/MISC/11/13). Thompson also had another suggestion: he would read parts of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, an idea which delighted Murray although there were obviously problems in dealing with so large a piece of work. His solution was for Thompson to look for what were likely to be new or rare words in the scientific articles. With his blend of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* and Hall's books, Thompson in this way became a valued reader, praised by Murray for his accuracy in choice of vocabulary ('Your notions as to the kind of words to be included in the Dictionary are precisely & exactly those set forth in the *Preface*' (OED/MISC/11/16)). Murray sent him a number of further sets of printed slips, and Thompson duly worked on the *Diatribae* and *Strappado*. Murray also asked him to acquire Donne's *Pseudo-Martyr* from Dr Williams's Library, while waiting for Hall's son to produce a fresh batch of books from Hall's library. After this (which Thompson completed in early September) he was asked to obtain the 1612 edition of Thomas Beard's *Theatre of God's Judgements*. He was also requested to add quotations for any other words which were not given on Hall's list, but which he thought might be useful. The next letter from Murray is dated 4 October; in it for the first time is a suggestion that Fitzedward Hall's work might not always be conclusive. Indeed the additional quotations suggested by Thompson appeared to be quite as important as those originally noted by Hall. Murray could only suggest that the omissions were caused by inadvertence, adding that as Hall had done so much, he must have done some of it very rapidly.

Thompson continued to work through the autumn of that year, dealing with L'Estrange's *God's Sabbath* (1641), King's *Lectures on Jonas* (1594), and Raynold's *Byrth Mankynde* (1634). Various linguistic, as well as technical, questions evidently came up in the course of work such as the meaning of *pro-selenique* in *God's Sabbath*. Murray, admitting that it was initially mysterious, explained that it stood for the Greek word meaning older than the moon or, as might now be said, older than the hills. *Pro-selenic* is labelled *rare* in OED; *God's Sabbath* is and remains the sole instance of usage. Thompson went on to read Sclater's *Key to the Key of Scripture* (1629) and Hales's *Golden Remains* (1673). Both were completed by December when Murray sent a copy of Lydgate's *Minor Poems*, another book for which Hall had prepared a list:

The writings of Lydgate are of great importance; he was in some respects the Dr Johnson of his century, in his free use of words from Latin (directly or through French), and being immensely read in the 16th c (far more than Chaucer—thus is he constantly followed by Spenser, who perh[aps] had not read Chaucer at all), his vocabulary is very important. I should therefore be very glad if you would go through the book extracting not merely F. H.'s words, but examples of every word L–Z of Latin derivation—all those in *-ation*, *-ture*, *-ive*, *-ence*, *-ment*, etc. (OED/MISC/11/26)

The native English words were of less interest since they could be covered by earlier and later writers; although it was possible that Lydgate might provide a

late example of a word which was becoming rare, it was not practicable to try to identify such items. A bundle of 500 slips, again allowing for a rate of about two quotations to a page, was enclosed. Thompson, like Hall, worked rapidly and on New Year's Day Murray wrote acknowledging his 'exhaustive' work on Lydgate. He was hopeful that, as Thompson proceeded through the book, quotations for the more common words would diminish. Nevertheless 'wherever you think it doubtful give us the benefit of the doubt and extract the quotation. Such a full exhibition of Lydgate's language will be of very great consequence to the Dictionary' (OED/MISC/11/27).

The work on Lydgate having proved such a success, Murray produced another important source: 'two volumes of the 15th c. translations of Higden' for which he asked Thompson 'to extract . . . the same kind of words as you did from Lydgate, viz. the Latinized terms. These characterize the Harleian transl. more than that of John de Trevisa, and have yielded many of our first instances of these words—sometimes indeed the only instances' (OED/MISC/11/29). Work here, however, did not require to be as fully done as on Lydgate; only longer words and such as had not come through French were to be noted. If a Latinized word occurred also in Trevisa, then it was to be taken from there by preference. The slips were printed to suit both or either.

Thompson began with Volume II as Volume I had already been extensively read. In just under three weeks he was ready to move on to Volume III, which was accordingly sent, with advice on steps to avoid repetition of extraction:

We think it would help you if you had beside you those quotations you have already taken out—this would prevent your taking out several quotations for the same word. If you agree with this we will arrange the quots. you have sent in alphabetical order, take out those for the letters we are working at (L, O, & Q) and send back to you the remainder. When you have read vol. III perhaps you would only send to us any more quots. you may have for L, O, & Q and keep all the others to compare in reading the later volumes. These quotations you are sending us will prove very useful—we find that several you have now sent are *two hundred years* earlier than we already have. (OED/MISC/11/30)

As the dictionary progressed, requirements had inevitably to be modified. In mid-March 1902 Thompson is being updated on current progress:

The five volumes of the Dictionary now out go down as far as the end of the letter K. Of the later letters L has been finally prepared as far as *Light*, O as far as *Of*, the whole of Q. Quotations need not be sent for any of these parts—although some you have been sending us recently for those portions we shall be glad to use in the *Supplement* as being earlier than what we have given. (OED/MISC/11/33)

His work continued to facilitate the editing process by remedying gaps. This year was moreover that in which Dr Minor, the Broadmoor patient who had for long contributed quotations to the dictionary, finally gave up his work. Thompson's success in dealing with the Hall material must have made him the obvious choice for assistance in this case too. As Murray wrote:

Dr Minor, who has so long sent us extracts for each letter as we reached it, from rare books in his own collection, is obliged by failing health to relax his efforts, & has sent us some of the most important books, in order that we may get the work done for the remaining letters. If you could take one of these, I shall be very glad to send you one with slips & instructions. Dr Minor has made out verbal indexes for the words he meant to extract (more numerous than were needed). You can either use these, or read the book independently, & afterwards compare what you have extracted with his List, and tick off those that are in yours, adding any that his list may suggest. (OED/MISC/11/38)

Thompson evidently agreed, and Fryer's *Voyage to the East Indies and Persia* duly arrived. The 'main thing', Murray stressed, was 'to get the words connected with the countries visited for which Fryer is often of the earliest witnesses, adding to these any other antiquated, novel, or peculiar words & phrases that strike you'. As he added, 'we should hardly quote him for ordinary literary words at the time, since we have so many literary writers of the same date' (OED/MISC/11/39). First uses from Fryer cited in the *OED* include not only *maharajah*, *Marathi*, and *Parsee*, but also (in the 'antiquated' or 'novel' categories) senses of *moil*, *mould*, and *out-land*. Reading was completed successfully by the end of October, and work continued on Dr Minor's books. The pattern appears to have been that slips were printed for the wordlists (despite the admitted view that 'Dr Minor's List [*sic*] are nearly always excessive'), and then book, slips, and wordlist were sent off to Thompson, who by this time was a valuable and experienced reader.

His ability to cope with scientific vocabulary was also a distinct advantage. In April 1903 this resulted in a specific request to go through the work of John Barclay (the anatomist, 1758–1826). Barclay had published in 1803 a small book entitled *A New Anatomical Nomenclature*; although this was now very rare, with no copy in Oxford or Cambridge, it seemed likely that any important new terms would also have appeared in the more accessible *Muscular Motions* (1808). And, concluded Murray, in case of special words they could get the University Librarian in Edinburgh to refer to the earlier work. The work was particularly important, Murray stressed: 'After considerable neglect, Barclay's notions as to nomenclature were resuscitated some 15–20 years ago, and his terminology is now largely adopted—notably his words in *-ad*, some of which we in ignorance missed in our earlier letters. Kindly extract for all words A to Z' (OED/MISC/11/45).

The letters between Murray and Thompson grow fewer in the last two years of the correspondence; Thompson clearly had other responsibilities, and after Dr Minor's books no further cache of work presented itself. The letters as they stand, however, throw valuable light on the contribution made by outside workers, and on the kind of support by letter which was needed and supplied. They also illuminate vividly the degree to which detailed guidance was provided and controlled by Murray himself: as has been seen, it does not appear to have been in question that the work should have been delegated by the editor to one of the in-house editorial assistants. And this is perhaps the central point: the relationship of each outside worker was directly with the chief editor. This had enormous benefits

in terms of the quality of the direction given; it must also have had a substantial negative impact on the editor's own rate for final editing. It is none the less one of the most remarkable features of the dictionary that so much was achieved by a widely disparate and dispersed body of readers and editors working far from the centre of production, and yet somehow holding with remarkable consistency to the central tenets of the work.

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