PREFACE

In her *Personal Pleasures* (1935) Rose Macaulay notes that on a blank page at the beginning of her copy of the 1933 *Supplement to the OED* she recorded emendations, corrections, additions, and earlier uses of words.

To amend so great a work gives me pleasure; I feel myself one of its architects; I am Sir James Murray, Dr. Bradley, Sir William Craigie, Dr. Onions...

If there is a drawback to this pure pleasure of doing good to a dictionary, I have not yet found it. Except that, naturally, it takes time.

With the publication of this volume we have now reached the three-quarter mark, proportionately about as far as the point reached by Dr Murray on the *OED* itself before he died in 1915. We are now preparing the fourth and last volume, and it should be ready for publication in 1985. It would not be prudent to start congratulating ourselves yet—no major lexicographical project has been brought to its last word without the final agonies of a marathon runner—but the glittering prize of completion now seems to be within sight at last.

The letter *S*—the longest one in the alphabet—needed to be divided. Calculations of various kinds were made and, in the end, it was decided to make the division at *Scythism*, though it is a word of no great account, in order to balance the size of the third and fourth volumes. The fourth and final volume will begin with an entry for the ancient and productive word *sea*.

We have continued to follow the main lines of policy described in the first two volumes, but with changes of emphasis or detail here and there in order to take into account the events of the later part of the past decade, the research interests of scholars in various subjects, and the vicissitudes of the OED Department and of my own life.

During the 1970s the markedly linguistic descriptivism of the post-war years was to some extent brought into question. Infelicities of language, whether in the spoken or the written word, were identified and assailed by a great many people who seemed to believe that the English language itself was in a period of decline. Regular columns largely concerned with verbal error appeared (and many of them continue to appear) in *The Times* (Mr Philip Howard), the *New York Times Sunday Magazine* (Mr William Safire), the *New Statesman* ("This English"), *Encounter* ("In the Margin"), the *New Zealand Listener* (Professor I. A. Gordon), and many other newspapers and journals. The House of Lords devoted a session to the subject on 21 November 1979 and another on 28 January 1981, in the course of which eloquent voices were raised against the use of modish words like *ongoing*, *relevant*, and *viable*.

My own views on these great issues were expressed in several publications and in many lectures and broadcasts—broadly that 'the English language is alive and well, in the right hands'.

Expressions like *right on* and *hopefully* bring out the worst and the best in men and women. They stand as emblems of social and political divisions within our society. These and other elements lying strewn in the disputed territory of our language are at any given time not numerous but are charged with a significance that goes far beyond the mere linguistic. If you are tempted to fulminate against them, or to feel uneasy about them, bear in mind that the English language has been in the hands of linguistic conservatives and linguistic radicals for more than a thousand years and that, far from bleeding to death from past crudities and past wounds, it can be used with majesty and power, free of all fault, by our greatest writers.

One small legacy of these great debates is that here and there in the present volume I have found

---

1 The text of these debates is recorded in the relevant issues of Hansard.
2 Especially in *The Quality of Spoken English on BBC Radio* (BBC, 1979). *The Spoken Language as an Art Form: an Auto-
3 *The Spoken Language as an Art Form, p. 17.*
myself adding my own opinions about the acceptability of certain words or meanings in educated use. Users of the dictionary may or may not find these editorial comments diverting: they have been added (adapting a statement by John Ray in 1691) 'as oil to preserve the mucilage from inspissation'.

The volume has been prepared in circumstances of great adversity, though not without many mitigating factors. The editorial staff remained more or less constant in number but very different in constitution as some moved away to other posts and others took charge of other projects within the Department. Also, in 1977, we left our 'shabby Victorian villa', 40 Walton Crescent, and moved to 37a St. Giles', a splendid spacious Georgian mansion in central Oxford, with all the disruption brought about by such a move. We lost our printers, William Clowes & Co. Ltd., Becclcs, after they had set the letters O and P for this volume. The closing down of their hot-metal department in 1980 delayed the printing of Volume III by six months before new printers were found and the material was transferred to Plymouth or to Oxford. The Department embarked on many other projects, including new editions of nearly all the Oxford dictionaries below the level of the OED itself, and completed a number of new dictionaries including the Oxford Paperback Dictionary (1979); three dictionaries closely related to it, including the Oxford American Dictionary (1980) and the St. Michael Oxford Dictionary (1981); the Oxford Minidictionary (1981); and several school dictionaries. My governance, at various removes, of these projects inevitably delayed the completion of the third volume of the Supplement. The Oxford University Press found itself locked in internal debates and wrangles about ways and means of surviving in difficult trading conditions. Trading profits turned into trading losses and unpleasantnesses occurred as those responsible for the management of affairs found themselves in inevitable dispute with the unions. The Department could not stand aside and pretend that it existed in an ivory tower of its own choice. The words picket and picketer are dealt with in this volume: all of us encountered the fact of picketing at intervals while this volume was in preparation. We continued to receive sustained and invaluable assistance from many outside scholars and institutions (see below) but suffered a grievous blow when G. and C. Merriam Co. decided in 1977 that they could no longer help us, as they had in the past, by supplying from their files earlier examples of words than those held in our own files. This volume contains numerous examples of the type '1934 in webster' because this great American dictionary house felt obliged to cancel an arrangement that I had made with Dr Philip Gove, the Editor of Webster's Third New International Dictionary, in 1968.

These adversities have left their mark but the pleasures of historical lexicography remain as a source of endless delight and can be observed in the pages that follow. The burgeoning of the word O.K. in its numerous spellings and variations; the engaging curiosities of the letter Q (this with X the letter always dealt with at greatest speed by lexicographers); the words of Yiddish, German, Greek, and Italian origin beginning with sch-, a vigorous group if ever there was one; the numerous Chinese loanwords or loan translations—for example, pippa, putonghua, Little Red Book, running dog, and scorched earth—with the Chinese originals expressed in the revolutionary (and one hopes permanent) Pinyin transliteration system; and the numberless entries with post-, pre-, pro-, and re- as their first elements. Those who wish to explore the volume further rather than simply use it as a work of occasional reference may derive pleasure (according to taste) under at any rate some of the following assorted entries: own, v. (of an elephant: to drag logs along a stream); parp (invented apparently by Enid Blyton); person, sb. 2 f (as in chairperson); Pip. Squeak, and Wilfred; pneumonoultramicroscopicsilicovolcanocosis (a fictitious word of 45 letters); Princeton-First Year (Auden); puddle-duck (an earlier use than that in Beatrix Potter's famous work); controversial words like piccaninny, Sambo, and Scientology; scripophily (one of numerous invented words for various collecting habits); and scroolling (Virginia Woolf).

* See, for example, the entries for phrasally, retrain (verb), require (noun), rubberneck, sales clerk, and sales force.
Some new areas of vocabulary or doctrine that I have explored myself have been dealt with in several papers published elsewhere. A new feature of this volume is the inclusion of a table showing how we have transliterated foreign scripts—not always, unfortunately, with complete success. I am grateful to Dr. J. B. Sykes (in particular), Sir Edward Playfair, Mr. T. F. Hoad, and the late Mr. N. A. M. Rankin for very considerable assistance while it was being prepared.

Inevitably and sadly a number of people associated with the Supplement have not survived to see the publication of the third volume. The following contributors or outside consultants have died since Volume II was published in 1976: Professor J. A. W. Bennett (my former tutor), Dr. E. J. Bowen, Dr. R. S. Cahn, Professor B. Foster, Dr. R. A. Hunter, Professor W. S. Mackie, Dr. K. P. Oakley, N. A. M. Rankin (from the Dictionary Department itself), the Revd H. E. G. Rope (aged 97), and Nicolaas Van Blerk. Special mention should be made of Dr. Douglas Leechman (who died in July 1980) and Professor W. S. Avis (who died in December 1979): there can scarcely be any Canadian item in the Supplement that has not benefited from the work of these two great men. Perhaps the most devastating blow of all came when Mr. Gordon Murray, a member of the editorial staff, died in June 1981 at the age of 32.

Major contributors of quotations in the period 1976–80 included the following: †Professor W. S. Avis, G. Charters, G. Chowdhary-Best, C. Collier, Mrs. J. Harker, Dom Sylvester Houédard, W. Kings, Miss M. Laski, †Dr. D. Leechman, Mrs. D. McColl, Mrs. J. M. Marston, †E. H. Mart, Mrs. M. Y. Offord, Sir Edward Playfair, F. Shapiro, Mrs. V. Smith, and Mrs. G. M. Spriggs. Of these Miss Laski and Mr. Chowdhary-Best contributed approximately 30,000 quotations each, and all the others named supplied between 1,000 and 10,000 quotations each. Indispensable batches of quotations from fiction, including detective fiction, and from works in the whole area of domestic and social life were received from Miss Laski. Our treatment of exotic vocabulary from, for example, the Far East, the Pacific, and the language of politics would have been less thorough without the contributions of Mr. Chowdhary-Best, of Asia Minor and the Middle East without those of Sir Edward Playfair, and of American card and board games, and of some other specialized areas, without those of Mr. Shapiro.

The outside proof-readers, generously industrious throughout the preparation of Volume III, were Professor A. R. Duckert, M. W. Grose, T. F. Hoad, Miss Marghanita Laski, Mrs. M. Y. Offord, and Professor E. G. Stanley.

The outside consultants to whom we have repeatedly turned while the volume was being prepared were: Dr. G. C. Ainsworth, A. J. Augarde, †Professor W. S. Avis, Dr. R. P. Beckinsale, Professor A. J. Bliss, Dr. S. Bradbury, Dr. Jean Branford, †Dr. R. S. Cahn, Sir A. K. Cairncross, Professor F. G. Cassidy, Miss Chan Yin-Ling, Miss P. Cooray, Dr. J. Cortés, Professor G. N. C. Crawford, Professor S. Deas, P. G. Embrey, D. F. Foxon, R. B. Freeman, W. K. V. Gale, P. G. W. Glare, Dr. I. Goddard, R. H. Hall, R. E. Hawkins, Dr. M. H. Hcy, M. T. Heydeman, Professor Elizabeth (Carr) Holmes, †Dr. R. A. Hunter, Dr. D. M. Jackson, P. Jarrett, Dr. Russell Jones, Dr. N. R. Ker, Dr. W. J. Kirwin, Professor K. Koike, Professor J. Leech, †Dr. D. Leechman, Professor B. Lennox, Dr. A. Loveless, Dr. D. J. Matberly, Professor R. I. McDavid Jr., Dr. R. S. McGregor, Professor J. B. McMillan, Dr. L. V. Malakhovski, Dr. F. H. C. Marriott, R. D. Meikle, D. D. Murison, †Dr. K. P. Oakley, I. and P. Opie, Professor C. Rabin, Professor R. H. Robins,
Professor N. G. Sabbagha, R. Scruton, Dr J. B. Sykes, Miss Tao Jie, Professor G. Treitel, G. W. Turner, J. O. Urson, Professor T. G. Vallance, Dr R. L. Venckzky, the Revd Canon Professor M. F. Wiles, and Dr D. R. Woodall. Many others have given us advice and comments on individual entries.

This third volume contains about 18,750 Main Words divided into some 28,000 senses. There are about 8,500 defined Combinations within the articles and some 4,500 undefined Combinations. The illustrative quotations are estimated to number 142,500.

Finally, the Editor would like to record his personal indebtedness to many individual scholars and institutions: Mrs L. S. Burnett and Dr W. R. Trumble, who made signal editorial contributions to the Supplement before they started work on a new edition of the Shorter Oxford English Dictionary in 1980; similarly Dr R. E. Allen, who succeeded Dr J. B. Sykes as editor of the Concise Oxford Dictionary and Pocket Oxford Dictionary in 1981; my other Senior Editors, Mr A. M. Hughes (for Science), Miss Sandra Raphael (for Natural History and Library Research), and, in more recent times, Mr E. S. C. Weiner and Mr J. A. Simpson; the library research staff who have managed to overcome the adversities now strewn in the path of anyone constantly using great libraries, and in particular Miss V. M. Salusbury (until she left in 1977), Miss J. L. Harley (retired 1980), and others who worked in London and in America far from the editorial headquarters in Oxford; Mr J. Paterson for his resolution of many difficult bibliographical problems within the inevitable limits of time; my hosts in Chicago and New York in July 1978 when I startled them and many others by suggesting in a lecture to the American Library Association that American and British English were drifting apart and that one day interpreters would be needed; 6 Liverpool University for their munificence in conferring an Honorary D. Litt. on me in 1978; those who welcomed me in China in May 1979, especially Mr Chen Yuan of the Commercial Press, Peking, and my interpreter, Miss Tao Jie, Peking University; and my hosts in seven cities in the United States in October 1980 when I gave a series of lectures on the English language at the invitation of the English-Speaking Union. Above all, I have continued to build up my indebtedness to those whom I see daily and who have given me superlative support and succour over the last six years, my colleagues and assistants on the Dictionary staff itself.

Oxford  
October 1981  

---

6 The lecture was printed with the title 'The Point of Severance: English in 1776 and Beyond', in Encounter, October 1978, pp. 129–33.