# Origins

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# Centennial Celebration of *The Century Dictionary*

## Origins

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*The Century Dictionary* (hereafter, the Century) is, by all accounts, one of the great achievements in American lexicography, celebrated by Frances A. March in 1889 as "the handsomest dictionary that ever was made" (450)—a tribute repeated by Sidney Landau in 1984 (72). In 1913, Stewart Archer Stegner, with a sidelong and admiring glance at the unfinished OED, declared: "The Century is, on the whole, the best completed dictionary of the English language" (117). For 100 years, it has been regarded as a work of minute scholarship and broad appeal to a wide public. Like all good dictionaries, the Century built upon its predecessors and added new features and innovations to traditional practice. The ancestral tree leading up to it was carefully laid out by the successive editors.

The story begins with John Ogilvie's *Imperial Dictionary* (hereafter, the Imperial) issued in parts at 2/6 each beginning in 1847 and completed in 1850 (Blackie, 22). In his Preface Ogilvie explained the descent of the large English dictionaries: "The principal dictionaries of the English language in use at present, are Johnson's, first published in 1755; Richardson's, commenced in 1826; and that of Webster, of America, first published in this country [that is, Britain] in 1832" (i). Giving these dates was, perhaps, disingenuous. Johnson's 1755 *A Dictionary of the English Language* had been enlarged to four volumes by H. J. Todd in 1818, and it was so far from obsolete—and so famous for the name of its compiler—that the successors to Johnson's publishers would later issue a new version superintended by Robert Gordon Latham in parts (costing 3/6 each) between 1866 and 1870. A series of complete editions—"two volumes in four" was a way of keeping kindred with the original—maintained Johnson's work in Britain and competed well with Ogilvie's Imperial in the closing decades of the century.

Ogilvie dismissed Charles Richardson's *A New Dictionary of the English Language* on other grounds: "Richardson's dictionary, a work of undoubted merit, may be considered a critical rather than a practical dictionary, and one better adapted for the philological student than the general English reader" (ii). That left only Noah Webster's *An American Dictionary of the English Language* occupying the field. The London publishers had begun to issue parts of it in 1830 and brought out a two-volume edition in 1832, omitting the word *American* and titling it plainly *A Dictionary of the English Language;* it purported to be a revised work, overseen at the press by E. H. Barker of Norfolk "from a copy communicated by the author, and containing many manuscript corrections and additions" (O'Neill, 406). This work, in Ogilvie's view, remained, in 1850, the paragon in lexicography.

> Webster's dictionary, which forms the basis of the present work [the Imperial], is acknowledged in this country and in America to be not only superior to either of the two former, but to every other dictionary hitherto published. It is more copious in its vocabulary, more correct in its definitions, more comprehensive in its plan, and in the etymological department it is unrivalled. (ii)

Of course Ogilvie was obliged to stint this praise of Webster; otherwise, purchasers would have no reason to buy his volume in preference to Webster's. "Upwards of ten years of unremitting toil and research have been spent by the Editor in preparing the work" (iv), he proclaimed. And so the Imperial was, as every new dictionary always has claimed to be, better than its precursors, particularly because it included "English Scientific and Technological" (in the words of Ogilvie's subtitle).

Despite competition in Britain from Chauncey A. Goodrich's improvement of Webster—published in London in 1851 by David Bogue—Ogilvie's Imperial remained popular, not least because of its title. In 1854, Ogilvie added a Supplement, published separately for purchasers of earlier editions and then incorporated into the main alphabet, and the book continued to be reissued through 1881. Walter Graham Blackie, the enterprising and prosperous Glasgow publisher, had a good thing on his hands, and he engaged Charles Annandale to bring the Imperial up to date. Like his predecessor, Annandale impressed readers of his front matter, dated October 1882, with *his* ten years of "labour bestowed upon this edition" (vi), though he omitted mentioning "unremitting toil." His work added, he claimed, 30,000 words, bringing the total to "a number much greater than is contained in any English dictionary hitherto published" (vi). But no longer was there any mention

of the American origin of the work or a celebration of Noah Webster's genius.

Now comes the central figure in the story of the Century—Roswell Smith. Born in 1829, Smith was a shrewd Connecticut Yankee. His uncle was the prolific author of textbooks, of which Smith's *English Grammar on the Productive System* (1831) was the most popular and profitable. Though mainly a farmer, his father, Asher L. Smith, was also an author, and doubtless the book most influential for his son was straightforwardly titled *How to Be Rich* (1856). The father seems to have had the same genius for marketing he instilled in his son, for subsequent editions of his book were titled *How to Get Rich* (1866). At age fourteen, Roswell Smith went to work for his uncle's publisher in New York, and five years later entered Brown University for the two-year "English and scientific course." Completing his studies in 1850, he read law with a Hartford attorney and then entered practice in Lafayette, Indiana, where, in addition to his legal work, he became wealthy through land speculation. Avoiding military service, he was able to retire in 1868 and began a tour of Europe. In Geneva, he arranged to meet Josiah Gilbert Holland, a medical practitioner and author from New England, and the two agreed that they would begin a new magazine "to encourage American art and literature" (*Dictionary of American Biography* [DAB]). According to the company history—though it sounds legendary on its face—this meeting took place "one moonlight night, on a bridge that crossed the Rhone at Geneva" (*The Story of The Century Company*, 1).

In 1870, Smith and Holland entered into an arrangement with Charles Scribner in a new and separate business, Scribner & Co. Holland became the editor of *Scribner's Monthly*, and from its contributors he recruited authors for books published by the firm. Smith was an innovator in marketing, and the company history declares Scribner's to have been the first magazine to carry advertising (*The Story of The Century Company*, 2). After Charles Scribner's death, Holland and Smith competed with his heirs who, in 1878, established a new company, Charles Scribner's Sons. Soon the interests of the firms collided, and Holland and Smith severed their ties with the Scribner family and began anew. In 1881, they formed the Century Company and began to publish *The Century Magazine* and *St. Nicholas*, a magazine for children, both periodicals lavishly illustrated and using the finest artists and the latest technical developments. An additional source of profit came from hymnals, particularly those compiled by Charles S. Robinson, handsomely produced and sold across the nation.

Roswell Smith sought and achieved a reputation for excellence

on a lavish scale. Here is a contemporary description of the building at 33 East 17th Street in New York where the Century was produced.

> The Century Company at last finds itself comfortably established and at work in its new and spacious offices on Union Square, North, occupying the entire fourth floor of the large building adjoining the Everett House [Hotel]. A more commanding business location in this city would be hard to find. The building has a large L bounding the rear of the Everett House, so that the floor space at the service of the company gives an immense working area. The entire front half of the floor occupied is devoted to the business offices of the company, the open space broken only by the cosy room of Mr. Roswell Smith in the south-east corner, the door to which frames an artistic stained glass window—the gift of the stockholders to Mr. Smith. The remainder of the floor north of the business offices and the whole L are occupied by the pleasant editorial and art rooms of the *Century* and *St. Nicholas,* and by the stock and shipping departments. In one of the most commodious of the Century offices, the draped chair and vacant desk recall the fallen chief [that is, Holland]. Passenger and freight elevators give easy connection with the street, while the whole arrangement of these spacious quarters gives a sense of amplitude and breathing room that contrasts favorably with the former contracted, though pleasant offices of the company. The view from the front windows looking upon Union Square and down both Broadway and Fourth Avenue is in itself an inspiration, while the simplicity of decoration, the neutral tints of the office walls, the solidity and attractiveness of the furniture and woodwork add to the air of welcome which the ample fireplaces and comfortable upholstery suggest. The Century Company is to be congratulated upon the elegant quarters in which it has found a home. (*Publisher's Weekly* 20 [November 1881]: 578)

Perhaps it need not be emphasized that the view inspired the business side of the company, not the editorial and lexicographical.

Before his death, Holland had suggested that the firm market an encyclopedia, and Smith saw possibilities for an encyclopedic dictionary. Doubtless he was also attentive to the new energy being displayed at Merriam by Orlando M. Baker. A small permanent staff had been at work in Springfield during the 1870s, and the 1879 edition of the Merriam dictionary contained a new words section of 4,500 entries and a biographical supplement listing 10,000 "noteworthy persons" (Leavitt, 73). In 1882, Merriam published a "subscription edition" adding yet more encyclopedic material in the form of a "historical supplement" by Horace E. Scudder.

The publishing scene in London was likewise well-known to Smith, and he and Holland had done unusually well in selling their magazines in Britain. Once Annandale's improved Imperial was published,

he recognized it as a way into the encyclopedic reference field. A reviewer also welcomed it enthusiastically in *The Saturday Review*, a British publication followed in the New York publishing world: "To ordinary readers there can be no doubt that all the information they want is to be found in the *Imperial Dictionary*" (398). Smith approached Blackie and purchased printed sheets of Annandale's edition. To the title page was added: "The Century Co. New-York." Smith also wrote a paragraph and inserted it into the space left by the drop-head of Annandale's preface.

> This important English work is offered to the American public, *without change or revision,* in the belief that many American scholars will desire to have, for comparative reference, the dictionary which is commonly accepted in Great Britain, as the standard authority upon the English language. More than ten years have been spent by the English editors in carefully revising the text of the present edition, with reference to new discoveries in philology, science, and mechanics, and in greatly augmenting the list of words and the illustrations. It is now probably the most comprehensive dictionary of the English language, and this fact, together with its encyclopedic character, gives it great value as a book of reference for specialists and the general reader. (v)

This note is dated January 1883, but the origins of this "important English work" (oddly described given that Ogilvie, Blackie, and Annandale were Scots) were recognized, and the colophon page contains a further note from the Century Company.

> Certain owners of American copyrights having claimed that undue use of matter so protected has been made in the compilation of the Imperial Dictionary, notice is hereby given that arrangement has been made with the proprietors of such copyright matter for the sale of this work in this country.

Dated 1 May 1883, this note reflects the settlement reached between the Century Company and G. & C. Merriam since Merriam was ready to assert ownership of the Imperial, despite the score of years devoted by Ogilvie and Annandale to improving it.[1]

Reviewers praised the Imperial's appearance, celebrated the illustrations, and recognized that the distinction between encyclopedia and dictionary was irrelevant for most users. One wrote: "It is something to have a dictionary in four handy volumes instead of a single ponder-

[1]Embroiled as it so often was in litigation, Merriam was shortly to attempt to suppress the publication in Chicago of a work published by George W. Ogilvie—apparently no kin to John Ogilvie—titled *Webster's Imperial Dictionary* (Tebbel 189; see Ogilvie 1914). Merriam failed.

ous one; it is something to have an encyclopedia in four volumes instead of sixteen or twenty" (*Literary World,* 71). Importing a British dictionary, however, ruffled national pride, particularly when American spellings were omitted: "The dictionary which insists on retaining the superfluous l [in *travelling*] and the silent *u* [in *honour*] is not the dictionary of the future" (*Literary World,* 71). There was no adverse comment on the price of the dictionary: $20—twice the cost of the competing editions of Worcester and Webster.

Roswell Smith was intent on creating "the dictionary of the future," and he was prepared to invest lavishly in its production. Re-publishing the Imperial was only a way of proclaiming the Century Company's entry into the field of dictionary publishing. Early in 1882, Smith had decided to use the Imperial as a foundation for a more ambitious project. As a first step, he recruited an American eminence to be the supervising editor: William Dwight Whitney of Yale. In the 1860s, Whitney had assisted Noah Porter in revising and improving the Merriams' product, and Porter continued as their editor for the 1890 edition, though his duties as President of Yale doubtless prevented him from doing much more than offering occasional advice to the workers in Springfield (see Leavitt, 58–77). Smith's choice of Whitney was a brilliant coup for his new enterprise. Known to a wide public through his schoolbook *English Grammar* (1877), Whitney was the greatest American philologist of the 19th century. His triumph over Friedrich Max Müller in the debate on the origin of language had taken place in widely read magazines, and his lectures on language at the Smithsonian Institution in March 1864 had won for him an international reputation for learning. But however willing to lend his name to Smith's dictionary, Whitney could only be responsible for the design of the work and the recruitment of specialist consultants (including two of his brothers: Josiah Whitney, the Harvard geologist, and Henry M. Whitney of Beloit College, who wrote the synonymy. Nothing loath to keeping the work in the family, Smith also selected one of his relatives as managing editor: Benjamin Eli Smith.

Born in Beirut, the posthumous son of an American missionary, B. E. Smith was reared in his mother's boarding house in Amherst and became a brilliant student at Amherst College where, after graduation in 1877, he was invited to remain on the faculty as an instructor of mathematics. A year in Germany included attendance at lectures by Wilhelm Wundt, the Leipzig professor who so much influenced Leonard Bloomfield's ideas about language and doubtless gave B. E. Smith the same faith in the material facts of language so necessary for successful lexi-

cography. On his return, he became an assistant in philosophy at Johns Hopkins—and it is probably through B. E. Smith rather than Whitney that C. S. Peirce was recruited as a consultant to and definer for the Century. In 1882, Roswell Smith engaged B.E. as managing editor for the new enterprise. In the assessment by George Harvey Genzmer in the DAB, we find:

> Credit for the plan and scope of the *Dictionary*, and for the high standard of scholarship set for it, belongs primarily to Whitney, but as managing editor Smith had direct charge of the endless details involved in the preparation, revision and publication of the *Dictionary*, which began to appear in 1889. (DAB, s.v. B.E. Smith)

When Whitney died in 1894, B. E. Smith was elevated from managing editor to editor-in-chief, and he was responsible for the subsequent additions to the Century: the *Cyclopedia of Names* (1894), the *Century Atlas* (1897), and the two-volume *Supplement* (1906). A disease attributed to his hard work on the Century afflicted him in 1911 and he died in 1913 at the age of 56. (While these melancholy details get ahead of the story, B. E. Smith's demise was followed by the obsolescence of his great work.)

Certainly the Century is Whitney's dictionary. In his Smithsonian lectures, Whitney had emphasized that words are *arbitrary* and *conventional* (both notions embraced, with a generous tribute to Whitney, by Saussure in his lectures on general linguistics in 1908). Etymology was, for Whitney, a recreation of adulthood, mostly irrelevant to the evolution of language.

> But etymological reminiscences, while thus of the highest value to him who reflects upon language and examines its history, are, as regards the practical purposes of speech, of very subordinate consequence; nay, they would, if more prominent before our attention, be an actual embarrassment to us. Language would be half spoiled for our use by the necessity of bearing in mind why and how its constituents have the value we give them. (Whitney 1869, 132)

The study of language is thus inevitably synchronic, and the duty of the lexicographer is to examine usage and collocation in the effort to display meaning. How far this notion differs from earlier ideas is apparent in the subtitle to Johnson's dictionary of 1755 in which, he promises, "the words are deduced from their originals." For Whitney, and for the Century, meanings are induced from the uses of words.[2]

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[2]Etymology was, of course, an important feature of the Century, and Charles P. G. Scott (1853–1936) was responsible for executing the entries. Just a year

Consequently, the first task in preparation for the new dictionary was the collection of citations. This extremely arduous labor led to a file of some 200,000 examples, a number "probably much larger than any that has hitherto been made for the use of an English dictionary, except that accumulated for the Philological Society of London" (Whitney 1889–1891, xi). Thomas R. Lounsbury, Whitney's colleague at Yale, undertook the "systematic reading of Chaucer" (xii). Of course the foundation of the Century was still Ogilvie and Annandale's Imperial, and, by arrangement with the publishers, Edward H. Knight's *American Mechanical Dictionary* (1876) was also extensively used. But the quotations—exactly cited and referenced, except those retained from the Imperial where no such exactness had been practiced—formed the basis for defining. The preparation of copy was overseen by B. E. Smith and carried out by employees of the Century Company; just how many is not clear, but they were sufficiently numerous to be called "a large force of workers exclusively employed on the Dictionary" ("The Century Dictionary," 315).

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younger than B. E. Smith, Scott was a student and protégé of Francis A. March of Lafayette College, recognized internationally as America's finest scholar of Old English. While still an undergraduate, Scott was elected to membership in the American Oriental Society (AOS) and was thus well-known to Whitney. (A newspaper account of the 1896 meeting of the AOS, reporting Scott's account of Malay, described him as "the humorist of the society," and concluded that "his jokes appeared so brilliant against the dull background prepared by [the] previous speaker that his paper was followed by loud applause" [*The Boston Evening Transcript* (11 April 1896)]. Another report described his etymological work for the Century in these terms: "Sitting on a revolving chair surrounded by a circular shelf on which ar [*sic*] all the dictionaries past and present, Professor Scott traces each word and then delves into dead and all sorts of languages for its original" [*Phonographic Magazine* 1 (March 1887): 72]).

Receiving his A.B. from Lafayette in 1878, Scott was engaged as an instructor of Old English at Columbia, and while employed there he rapidly completed his A.M. and Ph.D. degrees in 1881. In 1884, he went to work full time as the etymology editor for the Century.

At the Whitney Memorial meeting, March celebrated Whitney explicitly and Roswell Smith implicitly.

> Perhaps no other editor-in-chief could have secured the adoption of Dr. Scott's plan for the etymology. Its thoroughness and comprehensiveness foreboded a voluminousness appalling to a publisher. But the publisher of the Century was no common publisher, and Professor Whitney's authority was little short of a categorical imperative. He supported Dr. Scott, who prepared the etymology and most of the philological material from the modern languages, not only by general approval, but by constant interest and cordial recognition day by day of the eminent merit of his work. (Lanman 31)

Though his plan to create a new dictionary had been made public as early as 1883, Roswell Smith saw that greater publicity would help sales once the volumes were complete. Murray had shown that volunteer readers would contribute citations if invited to do so, and in 1886 Smith followed that lead and appealed to patriotic motives.

> Quite an army of persons has been at work for several years reading standard American and English books in search of quotations, of which an immense number will be used. American writers, such as Emerson, Lowell, Hawthorne, Irving, Whittier, Longfellow, Holmes, and our distinguished scientists will receive special attention. (*Publisher's Weekly* 29 [1886]: 737)

The accumulation of such materials had grown to immense size. Fear of fire (and the reluctance of insurance companies to guarantee the value of the collection of papers) led to a remarkable development, the use of microfilm. Though the word *microfilm* did not appear until 1927, the application of the technique in publishing begins with the Century. As editing proceeded, piles of paper numbering some 25,000 sheets had accumulated by 1887, and these contained notations for cross-references, commentary by the specialist editors, corrections, and interlineations. Each sheet was photographed and a negative 1¾" x 2" was created. The report of this practice declared: "all the words upon the positives of this size can be read with a magnifying glass," surely a difficult and wearying practice if it were possible at all.) Photographic reduction had suggested itself to one member of the staff who recollected that letters so photographed had been transmitted by carrier pigeons "during the siege of Paris" (*Publisher's Weekly* 30 [15 January 1887]: 68). And sure enough: just after midnight on 7 July 1888, a fire started in a bindery in the Century Building. Fortunately, much of the material for the Dictionary and the wood-blocks for its illustrations were stored at De Vinne's press on Lafayette Place, and some of the editorial work was being carried out elsewhere (at 76 Fifth Avenue), but the fire spread, and the office of the editor of *The Century Magazine* was entirely destroyed—"its library, works of art, elaborate carvings and collections of manuscript" (*Publisher's Weekly* 34 [14 July 1888]: 41).

In May 1889, the first installment of the Century was ready for the public at a retail price of $2.50; by subscription the cost was $60 for the sections which were expected to be issued monthly over a two-year period. Cloth binding would add another $60 for the set; binding in "full sheep" an additional $90. At a price of $120 for cloth (or $150 for leather), the books were staggeringly expensive. *Publisher's Weekly* un-

derstated the matter in predicting: "the work seems to us to afford a wide and paying field for booksellers to work up as agents" (35 [30 March 1889]: 465). Immediately, the Company corrected this speculation. Booksellers were to be entirely shut out of the distribution system; instead, the Company would deal exclusively "through regularly authorized agents and canvassers" ([13 April]: 547).

Completing the installment publication took a little more than the 24 month period promised, but by December 1891, the 24 parts had appeared: "7,046 large quarto pages including about 500,000 definitions of upwards of 215,000 words, 50,000 defined phrases, 300,000 illustrative quotations, and 8,000 cuts" (*Publisher's Weekly* 40 [19 December 1891]: 1,026). It was a great but exhausting achievement. Whitney had fallen ill in 1886 and would die in 1894; those memorializing him claimed that he had read every page of the dictionary as it passed to the press, though perhaps this report was a slightly enhanced tribute to a scholar who had worked with uncommon vigor and thoroughness for his entire life (see Lanman). Roswell Smith, too, was worn out by the strenuous enterprise; he became an invalid about the time publication commenced, and a series of strokes preceded his death in April 1892. Whitney and Smith saw the fruits of their labor but were unable to savor them.

The public, however, welcomed the new reference work. Reviews were excellent, even adulatory. From London, the *Athenæum* opined: "The American characteristics of enterprise and thoroughness are conspicuously illustrated by the 'Century Dictionary,' which bids fair to be far and away the largest and best general and encyclopædic dictionary of the English Language" (270). From Chicago, *The Dial* praised the new work in a series of extravagant metaphors.

> No opportunity is lost to insinuate information; every crevice is fact-crammed; knowledge is sprung upon the unwary reader at every turn; we are enfiladed with learning and ambushed into erudition. (Anderson 1889, 96)

This tribute must have pleased Whitney, the principal source of "thoroughness," and Roswell Smith, the undoubted exemplar of "enterprise"—particularly when this judgment, based on the first volume, reached them while they were still in health and could enjoy their celebrity.

Marketing the Century provides a wonderful story of thoroughness and enterprise. In the Prospectus, Roswell Smith explained the method of distribution.

> Subscriptions to the Dictionary are taken by agents, but since many persons may not wish to wait until an agent calls upon them, we

> will receive subscriptions sent directly to us, and will request the agent in charge of the territory to supply the parts. If subscribers cannot promptly be reached in this way, we will send the parts directly from this office as they are issued. (10)

This method was an innovation. In an appreciation of its success, the publisher George H. Doran recalled in his memoirs: "There are now so many other installment-selling schemes, while in Century Dictionary days the only formidable rivals were sewing-machines and pianos" (104).

The success of such selling depended on mass publicity and intensive canvassing. At the 1893 World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago, the Century Company mounted a lavish exhibition of which the dictionary was the centerpiece. (The Merriams' grand showcase of dictionaries had appeared amid the clutter of the Philadelphia Centennial in 1876 and is still to be seen at the Smithsonian in Washington.) After the Exposition, the exhibit was installed as a permanent feature of the Century offices on East 17th Street "just as it appeared in Chicago" (*Publisher's Weekly* 44 [16 December 16 1893]: 1,003). Later, as the commercial center of Manhattan began to drift northward, it was placed on temporary exhibit in a vacant shop window on Fifth Avenue at 26th Street (*Publisher's Weekly* 54 [19 November 1898]).

Institutional sales doubtless helped overcome resistance to the extremely high price of the set by giving readers experience in using it, and the Century appeared just as public libraries endowed by Andrew Carnegie were springing up across the land. However, the financial panic of 1893 reduced cash flow for the Century Company. The directors were persuaded to enter a distribution agreement with James and George Clarke, Canadian-born publishers who had made a fortune pirating foreign books in the years before the United States signed international copyright treaties. The Clarke brothers renamed the work *The Century Dictionary and Cyclopedia* (1896) and added B. E. Smith's volume of names and the atlas to complete the set. Using department-store book departments, "they began to give the dictionary the kind of promotional campaign it had never enjoyed before in the conservative hands of the Century Company" (Tebbel, 447).

The selling technique drew an accolade in Doran's memoir of publishing.

> In each city of considerable size and importance the Clarkes selected the most representative department-store as headquarters for their local Century Dictionary campaign. . . . The great dictionary was complete; it was available to libraries, students, scholars, colleges, universities and individuals. Full prospectus on application. Thus it pursued its dignified progress among the intellectual *élite* of America. Some

> day perhaps it would provide a fair dividend return upon a colossal investment. The Century Company was wealthy. Roswell Smith had given to it great impulse and genius; but he had gone and with him went the great momentum of the company. . . .
>
> The old files of Century Dictionary publicity are a joy to read. The best and most intellectual talent was engaged, first—to make a drive for the intelligent in a community—to convince the householder that he really did not have a home and that he was shirking the educational obligations of paternity if he did not possess a Century Dictionary. This intensive revivalistic campaign would continue for thirty, forty-five, or sixty days according to the size and importance of the community. Towards the close would come the drawing of the net—Last Ten Days! Last Nine Days! Last Three Days! Tomorrow the last day, after which the price would be increased. And it was. But what results—tremendous. Almost incalculable. (103–04)

Not entirely incalculable. According to Doran, by 1906 the Clarkes had compiled a list of 200,000 subscribers, and to them they attempted—not very successfully—to market B. E. Smith's two-volume Supplement. The Century Company paid off its investment and was left with a substantial cash surplus; the Clarke brothers made yet another fortune.

Like too many other successful dictionary publishers, the Century Company was content to bask in the success of its great reference work. Just as the proprietors of the dictionaries of Joseph Emerson Worcester and of James A. H. Murray failed to reinvest promptly their profits in continuing lexicography, so the Century was allowed to lapse through neglect. True, the 1911 edition distributed the Supplement into the main alphabet and added new words, but there was little additional work and no further innovations. The two-volume *New Century Dictionary of the English Language* (1927) was intended, according to its compilers, to be "more moderate in compass and more popular in character" (iii), but the "obligations of paternity" did not weigh heavily on those who did not own one. Of course the New Century, in its turn, was the foundation of Clarence Barnhart's *American College Dictionary* (1947) and his *World Book Encyclopedia Dictionary* (1963). But the retirement of B. E. Smith from an active role in the Century in 1911 marked the end of a great era in American lexicography. Staff members were dispersed to other projects[3]; scholarly publishing continued in the form of noncommercial books sponsored by, for instance, the Modern Language Association. But

[3]For a time, C.P.G. Scott was employed by Andrew Carnegie to advance the cause of simplified spelling. Following Scott's death in 1936, his magnificent collection of dictionaries was sold to the New York Public Library.

the audacity and confidence of Roswell Smith died with him, and no great enterprises were subsequently undertaken. Unable to withstand the austerity of the Depression, the Century Company merged with Appleton in 1933.

Like all the great dictionaries, however, the Century survives. Its authority and usages are cited 2,118 times in the OED, though mainly for such trivial expressions as *Brazilian pebble, Holy Ghost pear,* and *mud-lighter.* More telling is the fact that it was constantly at Murray's side as he slogged away at his great work, slowed by too few assistants and insufficient funds. When the first parts of the Century appeared, Murray was enraged and fearful that the rapid progress of the American dictionary would discredit his own efforts—he was still engaged with entries in C as it reached completion. In 1890 he even attacked Whitney in print, only to be soothed and admonished by Francis A. March, the organizer of American readers for the OED (K.M.E. Murray, 266–67).[4] In her biography of her grandfather, Elisabeth Murray says that because of the rapid progress of the Century, Whitney and B. E. Smith "lost the advantage of drawing on" Murray's efforts (372, n. 23). She seems insufficiently appreciative that the OED thus gained the advantage of drawing upon the Century.[5] In fact, the influence of the Century pervades the OED, though Murray mentioned it only in his tabulation of the number of entries in his successive fascicles to show how many more words he had treated than had other large dictionaries. There is something ungenerous in this lack of acknowledgment, and Whitney is never once mentioned by name in these prefaces (see Raymond). But the reason is not far to seek. Murray lacked what Whitney enjoyed: the lavish support of a publisher who would allow him to produce his dictionary within his lifetime.[6]

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[4]Murray's ungenerous review (see Murray 1890) and March's response are discussed further by Liberman in this colloquium. It is likely that Murray also abetted Mayhew's scurrilous attack. Mayhew's penultimate sentence declared: "Enough perhaps has been brought forward to show that the *Century Dictionary* is not a thoroughly trust-worthy guide, and that it gives ample proof of careless workmanship and inaccurate scholarship" (Mayhew 457).

[5]On 14 February 1893, F. J. Furnivall reported to Murray the views of several of the members of the Philological Society who had examined Murray's draft entry for *crush*: "All of us would use the Cent. Dict. freely. If you think leave is wanted, I'll write to Whitney for it, as no doubt the [Century] Company w$^{d}$ attend to him" (OED Archives). There is no evidence that any such approach was made, but there are obvious if unacknowledged traces of the Century in the OED.

[6]Murray certainly recognized what one of the reviewers stated in print: He would

What use is the Century today? Of course in most respects, it has been digested into the dictionaries of the past century. But just this spring I learned that one of the editors of the *Dictionary of American Regional English* would like to purchase another set of the 1911 edition. The one he has been using is worn out.

## Acknowledgments

Many years ago the late Hans Kurath gave me a copy of the 1911 edition of the Century, and recently Thomas J. Cresswell presented me with a set of the 1889–1891 volumes. Michael Hancher also duplicated his photocopy of the *Prospectus of The Century Dictionary* from the Library of Congress. Jenny McMorris, OED archivist, supplied me with a copy of her thorough index to the names found in Murray's prefaces. Finally, Andrew Scott Crawford lent me a scrapbook of C.P.G. Scott's papers. I much appreciate the generosity of all five.

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not survive until the OED was completed. "The purchasers of the latter [i. e., the Century] ought to find some compensation in the circumstance that they may, if in good health, fairly hope to live to see the end of it,—and the study of so exquisite a work might well tend to prolong the life of the enthusiastic student of words and things, by giving him something very pleasant to look forward to. But it becomes the subscribers to Dr. Murray's noble work to be less sanguine. Begun some thirty years ago, its first installment appeared in 1884, and its veteran editor-in-chief is now heroically struggling through the letter C. The nineteenth century will give place to the twentieth, nay, the language itself may take on an altered complexion, before Dr. Murray can write *finis*" (Anderson 1889, 96).

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