

# THE ENCYCLOPAEDIC DICTIONARY

JEFF GRANT

Hastings, New Zealand

I first met Great Uncle Derwent and Great Aunt Dolly when I was a young boy. Already mad about words, it didn't take me long to discover the treasure in their bookcase. On the bottom shelf, looking slightly worse for wear, was The Encyclopaedic Dictionary, published between 1886 and 1890, by Cassell and Company of London, Paris and New York. I spent an hour poring over the first of its seven volumes, eagerly examining the unfamiliar terms and admiring the many detailed illustrations. The old man couldn't help but notice my fascination, even though he was engaged in a lively conversation with my parents while I was away in another world. He told us he wished we could have the dictionary, but it had been promised to another relation.

Over the years my involvement with words grew, along with my collection of references. I never forgot The Encyclopaedic Dictionary though. Our last meeting with Derwent was a somewhat sad occasion. His wife had died and he was living in an old folks' home. The mind once active had succumbed to senility, but in a lucid spell he recalled our earlier visit and my interest in the old dictionary.

Great Uncle Derwent died in his 97th year on my birthday in 1987. We didn't find out about his death until many months afterwards when a letter arrived from his solicitor. My parents had been left two old paintings in the will, and I was to get ... no, not the dictionary, but an odd-looking pottery wine vessel (at least that's what we think it is). When collecting these items we mentioned the dictionary and the impression it had made on me as a youngster all those years before. That could have been the end of the story, but fate took a hand in proceedings. A short time later I received another solicitor's letter. The person to whom The Encyclopaedic Dictionary had been bequeathed hadn't taken possession of the books. I could hardly believe my luck! It was as if I was meant to have them.

The aged volumes were eventually delivered early this year. They are pretty much as I remember them, with dilapidated covers faded by the sun, and small patches of mildew on some of the pages. Considering their age, the books are all in remarkably good condition. The dictionary contains 5629 pages, 180,000 headwords, and many hundreds of black and white illustrations. The pictures are in the main most enlightening, but I did chuckle when I saw the Apteryx, which looks more like a pelican than a kiwi! And of course our national bird hasn't gone the way of the dodo, as

predicted in the footnote.

To give **Word Ways** readers a taste of this classic work, I have selected one unusual specimen from each letter of the alphabet, none of which appear in Webster's Second (1934), Webster's Third, Funk and Wagnalls New Standard (1924), or the Oxford English Dictionary (with Supplements). These words are echoes from the past, long-forgotten oddities of a bygone age. We can count ourselves lucky they are preserved for posterity in at least one reference.

- AXAYACATL a Mexican fly, the eggs of which are collected and sold as a kind of caviare
- BORLASIA a nocturnal ribbon worm of the British and French coast, which attains a length of fifteen feet
- CROTAPHITIS pain in the temples
- DYSCOLOUS harassing, wearing (said of diseases)
- ENYSITE a variety of lettsomite (not a good species, but a mechanical mixture of two or more minerals)
- FAZZOLET a handkerchief
- GALEOBDOLON weaselsnout, a foul-smelling plant found in hedges and copses, chiefly on chalk and limestone
- HAEMATOLOGIA a treatise on the blood
- IVARANCUSA an essential oil obtained from an Indian grass
- JAUMANGE Dutch flummery (a variety of blancmange)
- KIKEKUNEMALO a most beautiful varnish, like copal but whiter and more transparent
- LHOTSKYA a genus of Chamaelauciaceae (the fringe myrtles)
- MOGAR the dried stick of the sugar-cane
- NAVAGIUM a form of feudal tenure, being a duty on certain tenants to carry their lord's goods in a ship
- OEGOPHONY a peculiar tremulous noise, like the bleating of a goat, accompanying bronchophony in cases of pleurisy
- PALOMBINA a kind of grape cultivated in Italy
- QUASJE another name for the coati, an American carnivorous mammal
- ROXBURGHWORT one of the roxburghiaceae, twining shrubs from India, the stems of which are a hundred fathoms long
- SYXHENDEMAN a man possessed of property to the value of six hundred shillings, in Old Saxon law
- TCHALAN a blue powder containing copper, used by the Chinese for producing blue colours on porcelain
- UINTORNIS a genus of picarian birds, allied to woodpeckers, from the Eocene period of Wyoming
- VASTO a writ against tenants, for terms of life or years, for committing waste
- WEISSIEI an order or a tribe of pleurocarpous mosses, several species of which are found in Britain
- XYLOTECHNOGRAPHICA a process for staining wood of various colors
- YPOLEIME the same as pseudomalachite, an orthorhombic mineral
- ZAWN a cavern