

This Enchanted World

Hardly a day passes, in these wild, unsettling times, without my marveling over how much more strange and unpredictable life is than fiction—any fiction, no matter how imaginative or far out. The inventive feats of Arthur Clarke or J. R. Tolkien (as, before them, Jules Verne or H. G. Wells) turn as pale as geisha girls when you compare them (the feats, not the girls) with the bizarre, preposterous, hare-brained lunacies you read about any day.

“Why *shouldn't* truth be stranger than fiction?” asked the soundest psychologist the United States has produced.* “Fiction, after all, has to make sense.” Reality, of course, does not. If you doubt this, settle down as I give you a sample of some recent carryings-on of the human species.

In Cilette, N.J., a Mrs. Elizabeth Hammond owns a pet 900-pound elephant, called Mignon, which was born in Thailand, sleeps in the living room, turns on the TV when bored, blinks lamp lights on and off to signal that she is going to sleep.

The neighbors think that Mrs. Hammond is bereft of cranial marbles, but her husband and children have accepted Mignon as just another revelation of the lady's love of animals—which include a pet lion cub, three dogs, a horned owl, a bobcat, and a python 12 feet long.

Mrs. Hammond used to train animals for their debut on the stage of the Metropolitan Opera. Her husband supervises the formidably antlered stag used in the TV commercials of the Hartford Life Insurance Company.

Mrs. Hammond rents her adorable pachyderm out to Republican party (naturally) clambakes or sales promotion extravaganzas. Perhaps the most startling aspect of all this *mishegoss* is that Mignon has developed a passion for roast-beef sandwiches.

A KENTUCKY FARMER went to the theater for the first time in his life, in Louisville. The program read:

Act 1—The Chapin home.

Act 2—One night later.

Act 3—The courtroom.

The farmer left after act one. He returned one night later.

*Mark Twain.

NOT LONG AGO, one Juan Luis Castillejo, apostle of an Entirely New Literary Form, wrote a book, several hundred pages long, which consists only of the letter *i*. Each page contains not a sign, word, or mark except the letter *i*. For aesthetic purposes, the *i* appears in different places on different pages.

To drive home the originality of his New Literary Form, Señor Castillejo announced that the pages of the book were arranged in entirely random order.

So far as I know, no publisher has shown a raging thirst to print this unique property. As one London wag remarked: “The publishers do not see *i* to *i* with Señor Castillejo.”

IN NEWTON, MASS., a high-school English teacher gave an exam to his students, juniors and seniors. The quiz consisted of questions about some of the most familiar names in the Bible.

The results so dismayed the teacher, Thayer Warsaw, that he described them in an article for *The English Journal*. I wince as I give you the highlights—more correctly, the low lights—of Mr. Warsaw's experience. According to one or another of his abecedarians:

Eve was created by an apple.

Sodom and Gomorrah were lovers.

Jesus was baptized by Moses.

The New Testament Gospels were written by Matthew, Mark, Luther, and John.

In addition to such tours de force of ignorance, the students were asked to complete these scarcely arcane sentences:

Many are called, but few are _____.

The love of money is the root of all _____.

The truth shall make you _____.

Seventy-nine percent could not complete the first quotation, 93 percent (!) muffed the third, but merely 84 percent struck out on the “evil” of the second. These were wholesome American kids, mind you, almost ready to enter college.

I can't say I am surprised. Depressed, yes. Discouraged, true. But surprised? No. A bright 11-year-old I knew used to recite the pledge of allegiance thisaway: “I pledge allegiance to the flag and to the republic for Richard Stands.”

Another child genius rendered the Lord's Prayer: “Our Father who art in heaven, Halloween thy name.”

A high-school student informed the

world that radium was discovered by “Madman Curry.” Still another believed that an antidote “is what you take to kill dotes.” And what about the dear thing who thought that the scullery mentioned in Dickens was a collection of skulls? A bright-eyed gal even assumed that *animal husbandry* refers to a mating process in the animal kingdom.

It should not surprise anyone that shoals of students in our vast free-education system think that *gnome* is the capital of Alaska or that a famous composer of operas is an Italian named Libretto. Or that a duchy is the wife of a duke. Or that whenever a queen's partner is not a king, but a prince ineligible for the crown, he is called a concert and uses the finest musicians.

According to one student, Cervantes's masterpiece is *Don Coyote*. According to another, Achilles' vulnerable spot was “a chilly heel.” Since Mr. Goldwyn, we all know that “caustic” is the opposite of “cheap.” And a sizable number of youngsters in the United States celebrate Christmas by singing that lovely carol: “Hark, the angel Harold sings. . . .”

Returning to Mrs. Hammond's pet elephant, I'll bet that many a ten-o'clock scholar thinks that the elephants which crossed the Alps served that peerless Carthaginian general, Cannibal. □

ANSWER TO MIDDLETON DOUBLE-CROSTIC NO. 64

(NORMAN) COUSINS: (MUSINGS)
ON A GOLDEN ANNIVERSARY

Optimism versus pessimism, like the arena versus the ivory tower, is a false issue. Certainly we should not minimize or blink at our problems in all their complexity. Neither ought we blind ourselves to untapped potentialities of brain and spirit for meeting them.

FRASER YOUNG LITERARY CRYPT NO. 25

A cryptogram is writing in cipher. Every letter is part of a code that remains constant throughout the puzzle. Answer on page 52.

J P J L F C F U J W U T W F ,
C V G V K R E J P N V C F R
H E V V T L E A A V E J Q F
X A .

G F C M J N X C K X P U J W X

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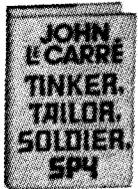


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Will Araby Bankrupt the World?

The New Year finds the world economy reeling. The quadrupling of oil prices by the Arab nations has produced a domino effect of unprecedented impact upon the citizens of the world community. This latest international cartel now holds its cold hand upon the growth and progress of both industrial and undeveloped nations. All suffer,

and the dizzy spiral of inflation and financial insecurity races unchecked.

What are the Arabs seeking? What are their real goals and ambitions? The following special section explores the promise and peril posed by the Arab petrodollar and offers a prescription for U.S. energy self-sufficiency.

Photo Trends

The Invasion of the Petrodollar

Arab oil dollars are like bayonets: You can do everything with them but sit on them. Now the West braces itself against a bombardment of petrodollars.

by Richard N. Cooper

Few world happenings in living memory have stirred up such a storm as has the recent petrodollar invasion of the West. But just how much of a threat to Western institutions is this tidal wave of Arab money?

Despite all the scare headlines, the prospects are perhaps more reassuring than they are frightening. Indeed, there seems an excellent chance that this second great Arab irruption into Western history will, in the end, leave both the

West and Middle East more sound and secure than ever before.

But in the short run, huge Arab petrodollar earnings can be alarming. The problem began during the Yom Kippur war, when the Arab states placed an embargo on oil sales to the Netherlands and the United States. This embargo was momentous. Above all, its success proved to the 12 members of the Organization of Petroleum-Exporting Countries (OPEC)—which includes such non-Arab states as Iran, Nigeria, and Venezuela—that by acting together to

restrict oil supplies, they had the oil-consuming countries over a barrel. Now it was evident that dependence of the major industrial countries on imported oil was so great that, at least in the short run, they would stand still for paying very much higher oil prices. Emboldened, OPEC instituted the now-notorious fourfold increase in crude-oil prices on January 1 of last year. At one stroke, this price leap gave a further fillip to worldwide inflationary pressures and reduced real incomes in all oil-consuming nations. For this reason, it introduced a strongly contractive force into the world economy—contributing to, if not causing, the current world recession.

Ironically, while consuming nations worry about how to pay for their oil, producing countries are left with the

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