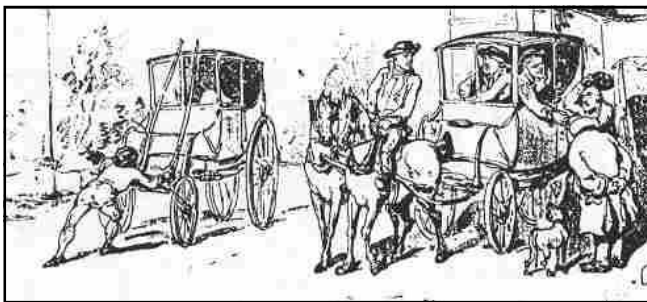


# The “Quote... Unquote” NEWSLETTER

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## LIGHTNING STRIKES

Now this really is an achievement to be celebrated. Q729 was our maddening old friend, the fabled foreign phrase-book phrase, ‘**Our postillion [or postilion, if you prefer] has been struck by lightning.**’ As I reported a year or two ago, Jane Gregory joined me in searching for a column in the *New Statesman* dating from the late winter of 1934 which M.H. Longson stated in his memoir, *A Classical Youth and other pieces* (1985), was the inspiration for his poem on the subject that appeared in *Punch* on the 3 July 1935. We did not find it. Then we came across another reference to the same article in a James Thurber memoir dating from 1937. Well, recently, Joe Kralich google.booked his way to something published in 1932: *Little Missions* by ‘Septimus Despencer’ – a pen-name of Ralph (or Ralf) Butler. Being still in copyright, the book could not actually be read in Google Books and the ‘snippet view’ of the text only tantalisingly indicated that here was something very promising indeed.



Not available in the libraries open to me, the book had to be purchased (via abebooks.com – there is no other way ... ) The author explains what *Little Missions* is about: ‘The three years following the Armistice of 1918 were spent by the writer in almost continuous travel in what are called the “Succession States”, – that is to say, the new countries which have established themselves, or been established, in the room and on the ruins of the Hapsburg Monarchy.’

In Chapter 4, the traveller goes to what he calls ‘Rump-Hungary’. ‘It was my fortune once to be marooned for twenty-four hours in a siding of a railway station in what is now Yugoslavia but was then South Hungary. I wandered into the village, and in the village shop which sold everything I found in a back-shelf a dozen of old second-hand books. One of them was a Magyar-English Manual of Conversation

containing useful phrases such as every traveller needs to know. The first section was headed “On the road”, and the first sentence in it (which I instantly mastered) was: “Dear me, our postilion has been struck by lightning.” This is the sort of the thing that only happens in Hungary; and, when it happens, this is the sort of remark that only Hungarians make.’

I would be prepared to bet that this is how the phrase passed into general circulation. ‘Despencer’ notes that some of the material in his book had previously appeared in magazine articles, so it is possible that he had made this observation before the 1932 publication. And it is conceivable, of course, that others had reported the particular Magyar-English Manual source earlier than this. But I think it is a pretty solid find to be going on with. Incidentally, the British Library does not appear to contain a copy of any such manual, nor does the Library of Congress. Perhaps it was just a very Hungarian publication, as ‘Despencer’ observes.

## NIFTY TOMB

My wife and I recently went on a tour of northern India and as part of my preparation, I dusted down the various things people have said about the Taj Mahal. The key one is what Edward Lear, the poet and artist, wrote in his journal on 16 February 1874 after a visit: ‘Descriptions of this wonderfully lovely place are simply silly, as no words can describe it at all ... Henceforth, **let the inhabitants of the world be divided into two classes – them as has seen the Taj Mahal; and them as hasn’t.**’ When I was on the ground, so to speak, Yusuf Asnari fed me another. He said that in P.G. Wodehouse’s *Cocktail Time* (1958), Lord Isleworth describes it as ‘**a pretty nifty little tomb – but draughty**’. Unfortunately, a reading of the novel shows that Lord

*The 42nd series of the radio show will be broadcast on BBC Radio 4 during Wednesday lunchtimes from 21 May, repeated late on the following Monday evenings. If you would like to attend a recording session in the Radio Theatre, Broadcasting House, London W1 during lunchtimes on 2/16/23 April, contact [www.bbc.co.uk/tickets](http://www.bbc.co.uk/tickets). As usual, the Listen Again facility at [www.bbc.co.uk/radio4](http://www.bbc.co.uk/radio4) will be available for a week after each broadcast.*

Ickenham is, rather, the peer in that book and he makes no comment on the Taj Mahal. Perhaps Yusuf was thinking of *The Clicking of Cuthbert*, Chap. 1 (1922), and this comment from Cuthbert to Adeline: ‘Anybody who was content to call you fairly good-looking would describe the Taj Mahal as a pretty nifty tomb.’ Or perhaps our quotation occurs in another PGW novel in which Lord Ickenham appears and there are several. Let’s call this Q3881.



Meanwhile, Tony Ring of the P.G. Wodehouse Society (UK) has noted this other reference in PGW’s works: ‘I was beginning to wonder if I had been right in squelching so curtly Jeeves’s efforts to get me off on a Round-The-World cruise. Whatever you may say against these excursions – the cramped conditions on shipboard, the possibility of getting mixed up with a crowd of bores, the nuisance of having to go and look at the Taj Mahal ...’ – *The Code of the Woosters*, Chap. 4 (1938). I am not sure whether PGW ever went to India himself. In 1931 there were plans for him to stay with a Maharajah but he confessed in a letter to a friend: ‘I get much more of a kick out of a place like Droitwich, which had no real merits, than out of something like the Taj Mahal.’

### TWO TITTIES AND WHORES’ BEDS

Following our excursion into possibly Dickensian spoonerisms in the last issue – *A Sale of Two Titties/Tale of Sue’s Titties*, and all that – Oonagh Lahr wrote to say that when she was working on Shakespeare’s *King Henry IV, Part I*, she discovered that the Furness Variorum edition of the play (published in the 1870s) suggested that the name of the lowlife tavern in Eastcheap which figures in the play might also be a spoonerism. ‘**The Boar’s Head** was maybe a deliberate choice and fits in with the picture of the inn’, she adds.

Well, first of all one has to point out that although, historically, there was an inn with this name in Eastcheap in 1537, there is no evidence that it was still there in Shakespeare’s time, nor that there was one in the time of Henry IV. Above all, it should be noted that Shakespeare himself does not specifically name it. The scene locations in his plays were usually not spelled out by him but added by later editors. I think the indication ‘Eastcheap. The Boar’s Head Tavern’ first appeared in Theobald’s edition of 1733. Later editors detected one or two allusions in both parts of the play to a tavern with this name, but it is not given as such. So

if a ‘whore’s bed’ spoonerism was intended, it was not of Shakespeare’s doing but in the minds of these later editors. And in the naming of a historical pub, there can have been no conscious spoonerising either. A ‘boar’s head’ was a simple fact, the sort of special fare you would find at a Christmas feast, as indicated by ‘the Boar’s Head carol’, of which there have been versions since the 15th century.

A much later attempt has been made to suggest that Dr Spooner himself once produced one of his ‘things’ in proposing a toast to a pub called ‘The Boar’s Head’. This seems extremely unlikely to me. Spoonerisms of course existed before his name was bestowed on them, just as malapropisms were abroad (and in Shakespeare, too) long before Mrs Malapropism was invented.

### BLUES IN THE MORNING

In a recent edition of the radio show, I included a round of phrases or sayings that *might* have originated in the lyrics of songs. I was encouraged to do this by my reading of Fred Shapiro’s *Yale Book of Quotations*. He finds ‘**Wham! Bam! Thank You, Ma’am!**’ as the title of a song performed (if not written) by Ramblin’ Joe Dolan in *circa* 1953 and describes the phrase as ‘alluding to perfunctory sexual intercourse’. I have not been able to hear this song yet but I have found lyrics to one performed by Dean Martin at about the same time, where the singer is referring to being dumped by a woman who has broken his heart rather than to his treatment of her. (Incidentally, I note that the Dolan song is coupled with one entitled ‘I’ll Hate Myself Tomorrow’ – could this be a version of the famous cliché line ‘**I’ll hate myself in the morning**’ which Eric Partridge called ‘a jocular way of declining a proposition’, or, ‘**You’ll hate yourself in the morning**’ – ‘orig. (1920s?) a mother-to-daughter or woman-to-woman catchphrase recommending chastity’? But there is a Country & Western song with the title ‘I’ll Hate Myself Tomorrow’, written by Hal and Ginger Willis, possibly more recent, in which the male singer is, rather, preparing to cheat on someone, presumably his wife, when temptation comes his way ...)

Fred also has ‘**Whatever gets you thru the night**’, the title of a John Lennon song (1974), referring I think to drugs – a phrase that Lennon apparently heard from a TV evangelist called the Reverend Ike. Barry Norman thought this phrase was of earlier origin – that Frank Sinatra had said it about booze. Indeed, there is this undated quotation from him on the internet: ‘I’m for whatever gets you through the night, be it a prayer, tranquilizers or a bottle of Jack Daniels!’

Anyway, the really interesting one is Fred’s inclusion of B.B. King’s lyric for ‘**I woke up this morning** (my baby was gone)’ (1952), as though this was a significant line in its own right or was the earliest example of the archetypal blues beginning, ‘I woke up this mornin’’. Well, is it possible to say when that was first used? A contender must surely be in the first verse of Bessie Smith’s ‘Empty Bed Blues’:

I woke up this mornin’  
With an awful achin’ head,  
I woke up this mornin’  
With an awful achin’ head,

My new man had left me,  
Just a room and an empty bed.

Though sometimes this is ascribed to Smith herself, *The Oxford Companion to Popular Music* states that it was written by J.C. Johnson in 1928. David Crosbie has been helping with earlier appearances of the line. In 1923 there are two examples by the Great Ma Rainey and one by the obscure Anna Jones, though this last was a cover of a 1922 recording by Trixie Smith. Then in May 1921 Ethel Waters recorded 'Down Home Blues' written by Tom Delaney, which contains the verse:

Woke up this morning, the day was dawning,  
And I was feeling all sad and blue,  
I had nobody to tell my troubles to;  
I felt so worried,  
I didn't know what to do.

David describes this, however, as 'an old-fashioned Tin-Pan-Alley style "hit"' rather than a genuine blues. (Q3848)

### MAPMAKER

As I always say when we are getting stuck with a query, *someone* out there in listener-land will know the answer – if only we can get in touch with them ... When I broadcast our findings on Q3786 – the poem called 'The Map' by 'James Walker, RAF' beginning '**How tiny England is this map will show, / And how she is the butt of many seas / That shaped her landscape to its subtleties**' (as in *Newsletter* 16.4) – I added, 'We should, of course, be delighted to know more about him.' After the show, we received a good number of requests for copies of the poem but also an email from David Oakley-Hill who was able to say, 'He was the Best Man at my parents' wedding in September 1946!' and attached this photo, taken on that occasion:



Then, together with his half-brother, Robin, he gave us a little more detail on the poet whom the Salamander Oasis Trust merely described as, 'playwright, critic, novelist, broadcaster, born 1911'. It seems he came from a large fairground family in the Manchester area (he jokingly referred to himself as James Walker, the Fairground Poet) and did not have a wide education. He was in the RAF as an aircraftsman. A volume of his poetry entitled *Against the Sun* (including 'The Map') was published in 1946. His only novel, *Fine for the Fair*, was published in 1957. His broadcasting seems to have included appearances in *The Critics* on the old BBC Home Service in the 1960s. He married an actress, Ann Wilton, and died near Ashford, Kent, in 1982.

And talking of 'additional information' queries, I inserted Q3870 because I did not have dates for Michael Barsley, the writer and broadcaster, who penned the parody of 'Jabberwocky', '**'Twas Danzig and the swastikoves / Did heil and hittle in the reich ...**' (1939) (Q1125). The usual avenues leading nowhere, I googled my way to the artist Alan Mynall who displays his charming portrait of Barsley on his website.



Alan confirmed that Barsley died in early 1993 in Jericho, Oxford, and Chris Gray of the *Oxford Times* dug out a fact sheet that Barsley had supplied, stating that he had been born on The Wirral in 1913.

### ANSWERS

**A20** Correction. The supposed Labour Party Conference use of '**the expense damnable**' was wrongly dated by me to 1901. In fact it was only from 1963-4. So, back to where we were. The earliest appearance so far is still the 1910 allusion by Hilaire Belloc (and without any mention of Chesterfield).

**A686** I rather enjoyed reading a collection of Ronald Reagan's speeches, published as *Speaking My Mind* in 1989, though noting that nowhere did he acknowledge that his speeches were actually written for him. Anyway, I was particularly curious about the peroration of a farewell address he made on 7 November 1988 in San Diego (a campaign rally for Vice President George Bush): 'So, if I could ask you just one last time. Tomorrow, **when mountains greet the dawn**, would you go out there and win one for the Gipper?'

Never mind about the Gipper reference, what about the other phrase? Joe Kralich has at last resolved the matter. This was written for evening worship by the American Congregational clergyman and hymn writer, Ray Palmer (1808-87):

With Thee, of all sad thoughts beguiled,  
Peace nestles in my tranquil breast;  
And, like a pleased and happy child,  
In Thy kind arms I sink to rest.  
Till night's dark watches all are gone,  
O faithful Shepherd, guard my sleep,  
And, when yon mountains greet the dawn,  
Give strength my heavenward way to keep.

**A817** In 1960 there was set up in Britain what became known as the Pilkington Committee – a government-appointed body – to inquire into all aspects of broadcasting. It reported in 1962 and was viewed, certainly in the commercial sector, as an elitist view of what radio and television should be doing. A whiff of its tone can be detected from this observation that was made to the Committee and included anonymously in the Report: **‘Those who say they give the public what it wants begin by underestimating public taste, and end by debauching it.’** But who said it? It is frequently attributed to T.S. Eliot, though he is not named as someone who gave evidence to the Committee. Mildred Tooke has found the evidence that confirms that it was indeed Eliot. Richard Hoggart, a member of the Committee, presents a vivid picture of the occasion in his memoir, *A Measured Life: The Times and Places of an Orphaned Intellectual* (1994): ‘Most impressive of all was T.S. Eliot, who asked to give evidence as the President of the Third Programme Defence Society [i.e. those fighting any dilution of the then BBC cultural radio channel] ... I was deputed to invite him to give an opinion on the foolish, false comparison which had been made again and again: “We aim to give the people what they want, not what we think is good for them.” ... Eliot paused a moment on the question and then produced, in a voice with hints of Kensington, the Middle West and New England, a sentence so finely phrased that you could easily identify the semi-colon before the final assertion: “Those who claim to give the public what the public want – (pause) – begin by underestimating public taste; they end by *debauching* it.” That fragment of uncollected, and unattributed, Eliot ... is naturally quoted verbatim in the report.’

**A1451** Luke Berry of Norwich reminded me of this query when he asked for the source of a widely-quoted line: **‘Before you criticize someone, you should walk a mile in their shoes. That way when you criticize them, you are a mile away from them ... and you have their shoes.’** This rang a bell and I tracked it down to an edition of the radio show that we recorded at the Edinburgh Festival in 2001. Ben Moor correctly stated that the starting point for this was in two American proverbs, viz. ‘Don’t criticize a man’s gait until you are in his shoes’ and ‘Never criticize anyone until you have walked a mile in their moccasins.’ Ben, however, gave this version: ‘If you want to understand someone, you should walk a hundred miles in their shoes ...’ And he completed this with what he attributed to the American writer Jack Handey (born 1949): ‘Then at least you’ll be a hundred miles away and have their shoes.’ I think we need look no further.

**A1657** Jane Gregory, as ever, has come to our rescue over the George Belcher charlady cartoon. It appeared in *Punch* on 13 December 1916. I, of course, had been searching from 1918 onwards, presumably because I couldn’t imagine anyone making jokes while there was a war on ...



The caption is, precisely:

*First Neighbour.* “AN’ WOT DID YOU S’Y?”  
*Second ditto.* **“I KEP’ ME DIGNITY, MRS. ‘ARRIS. ‘PIG’ I SEZ, AN’ SWEP’ OUT.”**

**A1876** In 2001, David Critchlow wrote: ‘I found a note in an old notebook of mine and I don’t know where I got it from. The two *Times* journalists I knew at the time didn’t know it either. Probably 19th century: **“Sir, there are some journalists outside, and a gentleman from *The Times*”.** Lots of people knew this. Some averred it was the caption to a *Punch* cartoon but a reference in a life of Alexander Woolcott (1945) made us wonder whether it was the *New York* rather than the *London Times* that was being so honoured. Now David Challener has homed in on the fact that the likely original newspaper was the *Boston Transcript*, although it was *The New York Times* (7 August 1930) that reported it. What a secretary said was: ‘Go right in and tell the Governor that a gentleman from *The Transcript* and half a dozen reporters are out here waiting for that statement.’

**A2732** At last, a proper citation for **‘my work here is done’**. Readers will recall that we sort of traced it back to the *Lone Ranger* TV shows of the 1950s but without finding a precise example. Now, watching *Blazing Saddles* (US 1974) over Christmas I was delighted to hear Cleavon Little as ‘Bart’, the black sheriff who has just cleaned up the town, declare to the populace, at the end: ‘My work here is done. I’m needed elsewhere now. I’m needed wherever outlaws rule the West.’ So, given that the Mel Brooks and Co. movie is a send-up of Westerns, I think we can take it as confirmed that this was perceived to be a cliché of the genre. But it would still be good to have an exact citation from an actual film rather than a parody.

**A2792** A year ago I reported our findings on the cliché **‘storm clouds were gathering over Europe’** and found that

Churchill's 'gathering storm' of the 1930s had been earlier anticipated. Now we have found not only, perhaps, the first of the 1930s uses but also an 1848 citation. In fact it was in 1929 that *Slings and Arrows: Sayings Chosen from the Speeches of the Rt Hon. David Lloyd George* included: 'Storm clouds are gathering over Europe. It will need all the wisdom, all the calm, all the judgement of the mariners who are guiding the ship.' And it is an anonymous poet of the 1840s who wrote in *Punch*, beginning: 'Storm-clouds were over Europe, light slept on England's breast. / The nation's heaved with earthquake throes, but / A cry went up from Passaro unto the Baltic shore, / And every tongue but England's had its echo in the roar.'

**A2948** People have been searching all over the internet for: '**Yes, but what does it do?**' / '**Do? It doesn't "do" anything. That's the beauty of it!**' No definite answer yet but Joe Kralich suggests it may have been popularized by some TV show. He finds an early appearance in the sci-fi magazine *Galaxy* (October 1957): "But what does it do?" Thorne spat derisively. "Nothing. That's the beauty of it." "Well," I said. "I suppose you know what you're doing ..."

**A2991** We were looking for confirmation of St Teresa of Avila's reported words, '**More tears are shed over answered prayers than unanswered ones**'. Truman Capote is the cause of this quote being popular because of his gossipy unfinished novel, *Answered Prayers* (1986). No confirmation yet but Mildred Tooke found this in 'Tears' by the American poet, Ellice Hopkins (1883): 'The saddest tears not over cares / Are wept, but over answered prayers.'

**A2998** Three years ago, we were asked for the source of: '**Tell her, till I see those eyes again, I do not live**'. David Challener has pinned this down to a poem entitled 'Marcus Antonius' by the wonderfully-named William Wetmore Story, who was an American sculptor and poet (1819-95) and friend of the Brownings in Italy. In his collection *Graffiti d'Italia* (1885), we find:

Tell her, till I see  
Those eyes I do not live — that Rome to me  
Is hateful, — tell her — oh! I know not what —  
That every thought and feeling, space and spot ...

**A3276** Question was asked, how about the phrase '**No more you and I, only us**' – could it be a modern translation of Omar Khayyam? Hmm. Joe Kralich has rounded up some instances, none dating from earlier than 1989. One comes from *Diane Warner's Complete Book of Wedding Vows: Hundreds of Ways to Say 'I Do!'* (2006): 'But today is the first day of the rest of our lives. From now on we will build new memories together. There will be no more you, and no more me, but only us ...' In other words, this would seem to be one of those woolly Hallmark greeting card sentiments – which should not detain us any longer.

**A3312** Question was asked, where did Sidney Sheldon get the epigraph for the novel *A Stranger in the Mirror* (1976): '**If you would seek to find yourself / Look not in a mirror / For there is but a shadow there, / A stranger**' – which he attributed to 'Silenius, Odes to Truth'? Simple, really. He made it up, as he admitted in a number of newspaper interviews in April/May 1976.

**A3483** We were asked about a much-quoted couplet: '**Where (upon Hartland's tempest-furrowed shore / Breaks the long swell from farthest Labrador.**' This is Hartland in Devon and the lines are quoted whenever anyone writes about the place. Perhaps the first to do so was W.G. Hoskins in *Devon* (1954). Still no news of its provenance.

**A3617** Jay Myrdal (a resident of the UK since 1966) wrote: 'My mother recounts a time during the 1950s in Missoula, Montana, when she was chatting socially with my high school chemistry professor, Mr Carol Miller. She had asked him how I was getting on and in a praising sort of voice, he assured her that her son did indeed have a very fine brain. He then went on to say, "**It's as good as new**".' Was this an invention of the wily Mr Miller? Probably not. Joe Kralich even found a newspaper citation dating from January 1929: "'[Of a brain] it's just as good as new, as it has not been used a great deal", said the humorist.' That was in *The Helena Independent* of Helena, Montana ...

**A3661** In the House of Commons (November 2005), Sir Peter Tapsell MP quoted the Duke of Wellington as saying: '**It is easy to get into Kabul, but much more difficult to get out.**' When I asked him where he had found this remark, he replied that he read a great deal of history ... and couldn't remember. Well, no source for this has been turned up but we have spotted a possible harbinger of the remark in a letter from the Duke (dated 12 December 1838, before the First Afghan War) that was published in *The Life and Correspondence of Henry St George Tucker: Late Accountant-General of Bengal and Chairman of the East India Company* (1854). He wrote: 'I had understood that the raising of the siege of Herat was to be the signal for abandoning the expedition to the Indus. It will be very unfortunate if that intention should be altered. The consequence of crossing the Indus once to settle a government in Afghanistan, will be a perennial march into that country.' Close and almost worthy of a cigar.

**A3831** As is its way, *The Independent* emblazoned across its front page on 5 December 2007: '**A PERFECT STORM**'. Inside, the economics editor wrote: 'The storm clouds are gathering [there we go again ...] over the jobs market; the climate on the high street is growing distinctly chilly; a typhoon of bad debt is buffeting the bank. Could a "perfect storm" be about to hit the British economy?' Well, the obvious reference was to the film title *The Perfect Storm* (US 2000), though whether this had any meaning was a puzzle. That film was based on a book with the same title by Sebastian Junger – 'a True Story of Men Against the Sea' – and described a particular storm off the east coast of the US in October 1991. As to why this was a 'perfect' storm, I am told that it was three storms combined into one, though where the perfection comes in, I'm still not clear.

**A3846** Alison Adcock sent me a long list of family phrases or 'the quotes of my ancestors', as she called them. Among them, there was something new to me: '**Walk up, walk up, and see the live lion stuffed with straw**' – this came from a great-grandmother and 'was the refrain, to be uttered in a variety of intonations and moods, through the history of a young girl who received good news and bad of various sorts.' This certainly seems to be a phrase and is variously cited on

the web as part of a Punch and Judy man's warm-up spiel and 'a genuine cry from Bartholomew Fair' (the medieval event rather than Jonson's play based round it). The strongest link would seem to be to a novel by the American writer Amanda Minnie Douglas, *A Little Girl of Long Ago* (1897). Chapter 2, 'An Interview With a Tiger', begins: 'There came to New York in May a menagerie. A chance like this roused the children to a pitch of the wildest enthusiasm. Wonderful posters were put up. It was not considered a circus at all, but a moral and instructive show, if it did not have delightful Artemus Ward to expatiate upon it. There were a great many children who had never seen an elephant. Hanny Underhill had not.

'Jim said, "There was a live lion stuffed with straw; a zebra that had fifty stripes from the tip of his nose to his tail, nary stripe alike; a laughing hyena of the desert, who could cry like a child when he was hungry, and who devoured the people who came to his assistance, thereby showing the total depravity of human nature; an elephant that could dance; and monkeys who climbed the highest trees and swung in the gentle zephyrs by the tail". I think this event must have been inspired by P.T. Barnum.

**A3853** Ralph Childs asked us to dig out a line from the Roman writer Martial that had been quoted by Natalie Haynes in Series 38: '*Lasciva est nobis pagina, vita proba*'. Never has so much Latin been quoted in a so-called 'entertainment' programme on BBC Radio 4 as on that occasion. Her translation was: '**My book might be filthy, but my life is blameless.**' James Michie's translation is: 'My life is strict, however lax my page.' It is from Martial's *Epigrammata*.

**A3855** Re-reading Beatrix Potter's girlhood journal, I came across this in April 1892: 'I think it was Dr Johnson, at all events I like to think it was, who said that **all wise men are of the same religion** (and when the lady asked him what it was, he replied "**Madam, wise men never tell!**")' It seems to be generally agreed, however, that the true originator was Sir Anthony Ashley Cooper, first Earl of Shaftesbury (1621-83). The old *DNB* includes the anecdote in Cooper's entry and says it is to be found in 'Sheffield's memoirs', which I'm not sure about, though Tom Fuller also finds the anecdote so attributed in John Toland, *Tetradymus* (1720).

**A3859** David Spratt, a Fellow of The Oxford Centre for Animal Ethics, asked if we could track down a quote by Winston Churchill that he'd once seen on the cover of a book called *The Glass Cage*. He was supposed to have said, '**Wild animals never breed well in captivity.**' One can see why this might be of use to David but, alas, Joe Kralich found that Churchill was not talking in an animal context at all. He was quoted in *The Nation* (16 May 1928) as having said of T.E. Lawrence (Lawrence of Arabia) – someone he much admired and whose obituary he wrote for *The Times* – 'A rare beast; will not breed in captivity.'

**A3860** In February, Canon Rodney Matthews answered a query that had been posed in *The Daily Telegraph* about the source of the couplet that goes: '**Some come in by a door called "push" / And some by a door called "pull".**' He quoted from Arnold Silcock's collection *Verse and Worse* (1958) that Winston Churchill had advised Silcock that it was

wrongly attributed to him. He had heard it quoted 'many years before' as:

The gates of fame are open wide  
Its halls are always full,  
And some go in by the door called "Push"  
And some by the door called "Pull".

I wondered if we could do any better than this? For starters, I noticed that in Prochnow & Prochnow's *A Treasury of Humorous Quotations* (1969), this is given as a 'Yiddish proverb': 'On the door to success it says push and pull.' Then I discovered that for a while (certainly by the 1980 edition), *Bartlett* printed a version beginning 'The halls of fame are open wide / And they are always full' and stated that it was quoted by Stanley Baldwin (who died in 1947) 'in a speech in the House of Commons'. But going a long way back, the seeds of the rhyme are to be found in Ambrose Bierce's *Cynic's Word Book* (later *The Devil's Dictionary*) (1906): 'Push, n. One of the two things mainly conducive to success, especially in politics. The other is pull.'

Then David Challener took up the challenge and uncovered numerous versions, beginning, 'The Temple of Fame is open wide / The halls of life are always full / The house of fame has many rooms' and so on. Possibly the earliest appeared as a poem entitled 'Success' in an American journal called *Public Libraries* (Vol. 13, 1908). Anonymous, of course, and quoted in turn from *Life* (not the later photo-journal):

It lies behind two swing doors, swung to,  
The audience room is always full.  
And some get there thro' the door marked 'Push'  
And some thro' the door marked 'Pull'.

**A3862** I began a recent edition of the radio show by suggesting that when the poet Shelley wrote at the end of *Epipsychidion* (1821), '**I pant, I sink, I tremble, I expire**', he had been anticipating the reaction of the panel to being invited to take part in *Quote ... Unquote*. This put Liz Wright in mind of a line from one of John Dowland's 'songes or ayres' (1597) (though where he took the words from, I don't know). 'Come Again: Sweet Love Doth Now Invite' includes the lines:

For now left and forlorn,  
**I sit, I sigh, I weep, I faint, I die,**  
In deadly pain and endless misery.

**A3868** Geoff Cornwall in Jersey asked about words appearing on a silver wager cup that was presented to an ancestor of his in 1685: '**No cut to unkindness, no woe to want / When means fail, friends grow scant.**' From my researches this would appear to be a lashing together of a rather true proverb (the second line, but not in any proverb books that I can find) and the two phrases in the first line (that were both known, separately, at the beginning of the 17th century). 'No cut to unkindness' is quoted as a 'saying' in Burton's *The Anatomy of Melancholy* (1621) and 'No woe to want when I am old (the rich man sayth)' was current by 1581. I am not sure what these two phrases mean but perhaps it makes more sense if the lines are reversed. This is how they reportedly appear on several small cups, known by the 19th century: 'When riches faile, friends grow scant; / No

cut to unkindness, no woe to want.'

There is a further inscription on the cup: 'Hands of [sic] I pray you handle not / For I am blind and you can see / If you love me lend me not / For fear of breaking bend me not.' I have not as yet looked into this.



**A3878** Mat Coward raised the subject of **'Don't blame me, I ----'**, as a bumper-sticker response to government failures or similar. He thought it started in the 1980s but I was able to respond with this from my *Slogans* book:

**Don't Blame Me, I'm From Massachusetts** Informal political slogan; US, December 1972. Comment on snarled peace negotiations with the North Vietnamese. The state had voted for George McGovern in the November election. He had promised immediate peace. Earlier, in the UK, after the Conservatives had won the 1970 General Election, came the instant slogan **Don't Blame Me, I Voted Labour** and a cartoon in *Punch* (28 July 1965) showed a car-sticker with the legend **Don't Blame Me – I Voted Conservative**.

**A3879** Antony Wakeling asked for an origin of the business guru's advice: 'When you are losing the argument, **don't shout louder; improve your argument.**' Turns out that this was advice given by the father of Archbishop Desmond Tutu – or at least that is what he says.

### QUOTER'S DIGEST

*Some of the quotations recently received. Where no source is given, the quotations should be treated as unverified. Verification would be welcome, of course.*

**'One's ability to perform a given task competently decreases in proportion to the number of people**

**watching'** – Mark R. Frank (who he? – so attributed by *Newsweek*, 24 November 1975) (Q1510)

**'The loud laugh denotes the vacant mind'** – Oliver Goldsmith, 'The Deserted Village' (1770). Actually, the line is: 'And the loud laugh that spoke the vacant mind'.

**'The difference between "involvement" and "commitment" is like an egg-and-ham breakfast. The chicken was involved, the pig was committed'** – hard to say where this illustration originated but it was a favourite of the American Bishop Fulton J. Sheen, SJ. He certainly told it in the Philippines in 1964 at the celebration of the Fourth Centennial of the Coming of Christianity. (Q1606)

**'Pour exécuter de grandes choses, il faut vivre comme si on ne devait jamais mourir [In order to achieve great things, we must live as though we were never going to die]'** – Marquis de Vauvenargues (1715-47), *Réflexions et Maximes* (1746) (Q3749A).

**'Britain gave India bureaucracy and India perfected it'** – *India with Sanjeev Bhaskar* (2007) – 'as someone once said to me many years ago'.

**'Never walk when you can ride, never sit when you can lie down'** – Samuel Freeman Miller, American jurist (1816-90), attributed in Charles Fairman, *Mr Justice Miller and the Supreme Court, 1862-1890* (1939). Previously included, this is here to correct Miller's surname.

[Note of meeting with King Ibn Saud, by Winston Churchill] 'I was the host and I said that if it was his religion that made him say such things [not to allow smoking or drinking alcohol in his presence], **my religion prescribed as an absolute sacred rite smoking cigars and drinking alcohol before, after, and if need be, during, all meals and the intervals between them.** Complete surrender' – in Churchill's papers, dated 23 February 1945. (Q3842)

**'In art one is either a plagiarist or a revolutionary'** – Paul Gauguin, attributed in James Huneker, *The Pathos of Distance: a book of a thousand and one moments* (1913). (Q3847)

**'So essential did I consider an Index to be to every book, that I proposed to bring a Bill into parliament to deprive an author who publishes a book without an Index of the privilege of copyright; and, moreover, to subject him, for his offence, to a pecuniary penalty'** – John, 1st Baron Campbell (1799-1861), Scottish judge and Lord Chancellor of England.

**'Happiness, remarked Maury Noble one day, is only the first hour after the alleviation of some especially intense misery'** – F. Scott Fitzgerald, *The Beautiful and Damned* (1922). (Q3851)

*Contributors: Tom Fuller; Peter Hobbins; Peter Kemp; Joe Kralich; Joshua A. Miller; Ned Pamphilon; Anthony Pavlovich; John Smurthwaite.*

## FAMILY SAYINGS DISENTANGLED

Anne-Louise Crocker wrote: 'When my Dad was driven to distraction by our failure to heed him, he would yell, "Am I inaudible? Am I invisible? Do I merely festoon the room with my presence?" I've never known where this came from, though as a child I thought he was saying, "Festoon the room with my presents" which sounded like a good thing!' When informed that this was a quotation from Christopher Fry's *The Lady's Not For Burning*, Act? (1949), Anne-Louise commented, 'I do remember my parents had a copy of the play in our house.' (Q3875)

John Robinson wrote: 'My Auntie Joyce who lives in Nelson, Lancashire, replied to something I had said with what sounded like "Remarku tetagisti" and told me that means, "You've hit the nail on the head!" And so it does when more accurately written as '*Rem acu tetigisti*' which is from Plautus. *Brewer* adds that this is a phrase in archery, meaning 'You have hit the white, or the bull's-eye'. (Q3877)

Mark English came to our rescue over Q3858. Rachael Rodway wrote: 'One of my grandmother's favourite sayings was "See to it, Titilinus". Over the years I have looked up odd dictionaries with no result.' Mark notes: 'This is one of those which solve themselves once you realize that a name has been misspelled. In this case, Titilinus should be Tigellinus, one of Nero's more notorious favourites. In Wilson Barrett's novel *The Sign of the Cross* (1896), Nero repeatedly says "See to it, Tigellinus, see to it", as for example: 'Request that he opens his veins tonight; if he is alive when dawns tomorrow's sun, not he alone, but he and all his brood shall die ere it doth set. See to it, Tigellinus, see to it.'

In my *All Gong and No Dinner*, I included the expression 'the left hand doesn't know what the right hand is doing', which is ignored by *Brewer* and the *OED2*, but was unable to come up with a date for its use, suggesting 'not before the 20th century'. No progress on that score, but Father Kevin Scully, having read the book, wondered if the idiom linked in with, or was a corruption of, the words of Jesus in Matthew 6:3, given in the RSV translation as, 'But when you give alms, do not let your left hand know what your right is doing, so that your alms may be done in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you.' I should think this is likely.

A phrase in the last issue's 'Poetry Corner' – 'weary, wounded, tired and spent', brought back to Ian Forsyth's mind, 'my Grandmother's frequent description of herself at the end of a bad day as "weary, worn and sad".' Ian googled his way to a 1903 hymn 'He Took My Sins Away' which has as first line, 'I came to Jesus, weary, worn and sad'. But Joe Kralich found an earlier hymn, 'I Heard the Voice of Jesus Say', which also contains the phrase and was known by 1844. It also appeared in an 1830 poem, 'Satan', by Robert Montgomery.

## QUOTATION QUERIES

The full list of unsolved queries can be found on the website. If you can provide any information, it is helpful if you can refer to the 'Q' number when doing so.

**Q3850** Crispin Burdett wondered whether he himself originated the saying, 'If you want to speak a foreign language, go to France and speak English.' Others take the view that it was said by an Englishman (possibly 19th century), possibly in a letter to *The Times*. We are still looking for confirmation of this.

**Q3856** Almost every travel writer that ever lived has attributed to Byron this useful promotional line: 'The most beautiful contact between the earth and sea took place at the Montenegrin littoral. When the pearls of nature were sown, handfuls of them were cast on this soil.' But where did he say it? We've already searched high and low. Sometimes Byron is said to have called Dubrovnik, 'the pearl of the Adriatic', as also (with perhaps more reason), Venice. Again, no proof. The only hard fact in all this is that Mark Twain definitely called Venice, 'the Queen of the Adriatic'.

**Q3865** Alan Watson asked for the origin of the injunction 'Be the sun not the wind'. The earliest use we can find is in a verse letter by the Revd Hilary Oriel in 1850 but most modern uses seem to refer to a fable about a contest between the sun and the wind to see which one could make a man take off his jacket. This source has not yet been found.

**Q3871** Lesley Judd asked if we could tell her where the saying, 'Times is hard – send chocolate', comes from? She guesses that it may date from the First World War and I guess that it might be akin to the soldier's desperate plea, 'Dear Mother, it's a bugger! Sell the pig and buy me out.'

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