

NO W & T H E N

Being the proceedings of the
ROMILEY FAN VETERANS & SCOTTISH DANCING SOCIETY

By way of explanation...

When the Turner family moved into the village of Romiley, in the County of Chester, it found that two major activities of the outside world were sadly neglected. There are no fans here; there are no Scottish dancers. Immediate action was taken to remedy this defect and the ROMILEY FAN VETERANS & SCOTTISH DANCING SOCIETY was founded in April of this year. Founder members are Harry Turner and Eric Needham: associate membership is automatically bestowed upon all fans who visit 10 Carlton Avenue. Our junior section - Phil, Bill, and Bob Turner - is carrying out an extensive propaganda drive to wean the youth of Romiley from "Cowboys and Indians" and popularise spacemen and BEMs. News for Scottish dancers will appear in future issues...

Fellow founder Eric has a wicked side to his apparently guileless nature: he is a debunker. Little do his customers suspect that while he is busily cleaning their windows, Eric is mentally exploding fallacies and debunking revered superstitions. Such is his preoccupation, that this arch-fallacy-hunter confesses that he rarely sees what goes on behind the panes he wipes. He must miss a lot of Life...

We had dodged out of Mrs. Turner's way, adjourned to the "Stock Dove" for our first meeting, and halfway through his first pint Eric suddenly announced "Jonah was not swallowed by a whale!" I had been saying bitter things about convention committees and while I paused to try and fathom the connexion between Jonah and the SuperMancon, Eric continued.

"Both biological and geographical reasons preclude any possibility of cetaceous rescue" he announced, flicking

cigarette ash into my cider. "The former is so obvious as to be beneath contempt. A glance at the map of the world at the time of Herodotus will expose the remaining fallacy. Embarking from Joppa, Jonah sailed westward to Tarshish, which the Encyclopedia Britannica identifies as Tartessus in the province of Cicilia in Southern Spain, near the site of present-day Cadiz. In theory, after three days and three nights, the "great fish" left Jonah within three days journey of Nineveh, a city on the Tigris, some 400 miles to the east".

Obviously, he had cleaned many windows that day: he had it all worked and was determined to unburden himself. I removed my glass from the vicinity of his ash-laden cigarette and just listened.

"Modern archeology and the use of radio-carbon 14 proves the existence of a land barrier between the Red Sea and the Mediterranean before the Suez Canal. Accordingly, the whale in 72 hours must have travelled through the Mediterranean, through the Straits of Gibraltar, all the way round Africa, into the Persian Gulf, and up the Tigris, a distance of about 11,000 miles; representing an average speed of 150 knots."

"Now - supposing the "great fish" to be a spaceship, with a highly advanced alien crew, the mystery is solved. By its air-tight nature, such a vessel could hide under water and, do not forget, some 80% of this planet is under water or ice. Assuming control of gravity, the aliens, by causing small gravitic fluctuations, could create a marine and atmospheric disturbance of such intensity as to render a sailing ship uncontrollable. There is evidence of astute alien psychology in the fact that they chose this method of terrifying the native crew into jettisoning their merchandise. In this way the aliens obtained Tellurian artifacts without arousing suspicion - plus one of the dominant species! For some un-humanitarian reason, perhaps because Jonah was sub-standard, he was rejected and set down within walking distance of (but out of sight of) Nineveh."

"Much speculation among historians and theologians as to the nature of the "great fish" (in the Greek, MAGNA PISCE) has been misled by the failure to realise that this is an anagram, and a bi-lingual anagram, from the most advanced tongue of the ancient world to the most advanced language of today. Small wonder then, that its meaning remained concealed so long."

He paused to sup his ale. The folk at the next table leaned forward anxiously, agog to hear the solution to this

riddle. "This anagram", he resumed, "reveals the nature of Ghod as a space-traveller unaffected by gravity. The meaning of the anagram of MAGNA PISCE is:

I, SPACEMAN (minus G)."

At our second meeting, Eric waved airily in the direction of the barmaid and said "Look at that woman". As I had been glancing in that direction some time, I thought the remark superfluous. "Who would think that a mere 954,546,217 years, eight months and two days ago her ancestors were glutinous amoebae?" he asked. Personally, her past did not worry me: I was content with the present state of affairs.

But Eric pursued his theme. It seems that he had spent the day brooding over the problems of Darwinism, and concluded that in his theory of natural selection, Darwin fails sadly to extrapolate his reasoning. "A giraffe evolved into its present form after centuries, because, Darwin says, its long neck enabled it to find food on the tops of trees, while animals with shorter necks died of hunger. Fine, so far as it goes."

I grunted assent and drained my glass.

"The trees," said Eric, pursuing his theme, "being living organisms, presumably retaliate by growing taller and taller in an attempt to avoid being devoured by giraffes. The giraffes once again, grow longer necks."

He sighed and stubbed his cigarette.

"Where will it end?" he asked.

"Let's go and see a man about a dog," I said.

The theme was still in Eric's mind when next he called. I was in the middle of writing an editorial blurb and threaten-never, but never, to join a convention committee again and cast a bleary glance at the book Eric plonked on my papers. It was a copy of Huxley's Soviet Genetics. Apparently the spectacle of Huxley debunking Lysenko debunking Mendel tickled Eric no end. On opening the book, I found that Eric had inscribed the following stanza on the fly-leaf:

"Forget Lysenkian eugenics.
Mendel's too. You know the Phoenix ?
That strange bird who's really venerable?
I'm told it's self-regenerable!"

Yes, our Founder is quite a versifier. Take this one which a contemporary rashly rejected:

N O C T U R N E

As Manchester daylight fails
O'er Lewis's and Baxendales
High above Smithfield Market refuse
Richard Johnson and his Nephews
And mist creeps round the dingy cavern
Known as Yates' Tea Total Tavern

Left to midnight mice and fairies
Lancashire Hygienic Dairies.
Home to bed and lullaby-lands
The staff of Littlewoods and Rylands,
Red neon-glow and dusk intenser
Woolworths, Henry's, Marks & Spencer

Unseen by hurrying homeward goers
Amalgamated Cardroom Blowers.
Closed to avarice and enmity
Employers Mutual Indemnity
And now in slumbrous dark enshrouden
Hillier, Parker, May and Rowden.

And there the window cleaner's Nemesis
An unlit block of empty premises!

(Will the theological students and Latin scholars in our audience refrain from writing - it's a good story, isn't it?)

Associate members of the RFBASDS include: Marion Turner, Brian Varley, Eric Bentcliffe, Sid Birchby, Sandy Sanderson, Walt Willis, Madeleine Willis, Wally Gillings, Norman Shorrocks, Ina Shorrocks, Bob Shaw, James White, Derek Pickles, Frances Evans.

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