

vintners, Venetian doges, Michelangelo, Donatello, Fra Angelico, goldsmiths, silversmiths, Raphael, Botticelli, Bramante, and Mino, the Raphael of sculpture; geographers, explorers, and diggers in the forums; the Borgias, Estes, Sforzas, Malatestas, and Viscontis, and the noble and ignoble families of Rome.

They all came back to me in a rush not long ago when I saw that the *Times* had picked a new Renaissance Man. This one had just been appointed president of Sarah Lawrence College, a small institution in a New York suburb. The new Leonardo, as the *Times* called him, was an IBM automation expert, a mathematician, and author of *Education in Business and Industry*.

The new Renaissance Man is Charles R. DeCarlo. He is forty-seven. "He can talk about Pascal as if he were his college roommate, sing whole stretches of your favorite opera, and then tell you what's happening to the debenture rate in Boston," one of his friends told the *Times*. He is also a "fantastic gourmet cook" who once made "an incredible soufflé" out of potato chips, bits of ham, and an avocado, mixed with eggs and cornflakes.

Blaise Pascal was a seventeenth-century man; opera was a post-Renaissance invention, and there was no Boston, Massachusetts, when the Medicis were in the banking business. I'm not sure about that soufflé; but in Florence, there is a small café for American tourists that advertises "corn flex" on its sidewalk menu.

—JOHN FERRIS.

WIT TWISTER #98

By ARTHUR SWAN

The object of the game is to complete the poem by thinking of one word whose letters, when rearranged, will yield the appropriate word for each series of blanks. Each dash within a blank corresponds to a letter of the word.

King — — — — loved to hunt
and ride,

Or — — — —, on rainy days,
inside,

His favorite — — — — ate near
his table;

An extra throne was in the stable.

(Answer on page 30)

Trade Winds

James F. Fixx

My comment, back in December, on the correct pronunciations of *protest* the noun and *protest* the verb struck a responsive chord in several readers who urged me to do battle against other everyday barbarisms.

Grace W. Snyder of Churchville, New York, wrote: "Do something about people who say they 'feel badly.' Though they'd never say they 'felt happily' or 'felt proudly,' for some reason they will say they 'feel badly.'"

And Dorothy Biagini, M.D., of Redlands, California, wrote to say: "Bravo! Now will you please do the same for the use of *presently* when 'at this moment' is meant. I practiced psychiatry for thirty-five years and nothing I learned has helped to alleviate my irritability when my ear is jarred. . . ."

Nothing wrong with *your* mental health, Dr. Biagini. The time to start worrying is when usages like that *don't* make you irritable.

Now that the Paris negotiators have finally managed to figure out just where they're all going to sit, a dramatic behind-the-scenes story can at last be revealed. This is the story of the gallant moral support provided by SR readers who, in response to this column's suggestion of January 11, dropped everything to send in their ideas on how to solve the seating impasse. Their letters, filled with humor, ingenuity, and some outspoken comments, have come from every corner of the country. (They are, in fact, still pouring in as I write this, and there is no sign of a letup.)

From Bethesda, Maryland, Walter G.

Leight, who describes himself as a "mathematically trained problem-solver" by both vocation and avocation, sent an imaginative plan for a simple round table—but one bisected by numerous lines of various colors. The negotiators are to wear colored glasses that let them see only the lines that accord with their view of things. "The contretemps arises when at least one party refuses to relinquish his view of matters," explains Mr. Leight. "The best solution, then, would seem to be one which permits each party to see the table reflect his own perspective."

Mrs. B. L. Coggins of Nantucket, Massachusetts, suggested two tables, constructed in the shapes of the Oriental symbols for the yin and yang—"a continuous reminder to all the parties of the unity of any two opposing forces." Rita Li Castri of Jamaica Estates, New York, also cast her vote for a round table ("since most diplomatic discussions tend to be circular anyhow"), but she'd like to see its perimeter fitted with conveyor belts on which seats would be mounted. "In this way," the system's inventor writes, "no delegation would be at the head of the table, and at no time would any delegation be responsible for its own movement or the resulting chaos." Carolyn C. Hall of Baltimore made a similar suggestion but offered a slightly different reason: "It would make them dizzy enough to agree to almost anything, thereby bringing the peace talks to a swift and happy conclusion." And Rebecca Bartlett of New York City offered a plan for a two-tiered table complicated enough to keep the negotiators in a



—Reprinted from *Saturday Review*, July 19, 1958.

THROUGH HISTORY WITH J. WESLEY SMITH

"No, I didn't commit any crime—they just gave me an aptitude test."

healthy state of bewilderment over just who was where and what it all meant.

Two readers — Melissa Mather of Windsor, Vermont, and J. Stanley Lewis of Ormond Beach, Florida — were, unbeknownst to each other, thinking the same thoughts at the same time. Each suggested that the negotiators should be seated on a Ferris wheel and that the wheel should not be stopped until agreement were reached. Miss Mather also offered an additional contribution to international unity: "In case of prolonged inability to come to agreement, the conference wheel could be set to increase its speed of rotation, so that if breakdown of communication should occur, the delegates could be dumped out on their heads."

And, speaking of coincidences, no fewer than four readers suggested a conference table in the shape of what is known to mathematicians as a Moebius strip. (You can make one yourself by cutting a long strip of paper, giving one end a half-turn, and pasting the two ends together.) The four — Joseph McLaughlin of New Philadelphia, Ohio, John Bertera of Melvindale, Michigan, Arthur W. Reynolds of Harpers Ferry, West Virginia, and Nealus W. Wheeler, Jr., of Ann Arbor, Michigan — all had much the same idea. As Mr. Bertera, who enclosed a sample Moebius strip, put it, "If you run your finger along one edge of this strip of paper you will find that the front is the back and the top is the bottom, etc. Thus, if you sit on one side you sit on all sides. This should make everyone happy."

Not everyone, however, found the table hassle something to laugh at. Paul Somerson of Wyncote, Pennsylvania, suggested that "the participants should sit around a large, well-calligraphed table of war casualties." Mrs. Lita Nelson of Watertown, Massachusetts, said the table ought to be five-sided — the empty fifth side symbolizing "the men who died while the dickering over table shape and other inanities proceeded in its leisurely fashion." Paul W. Sedler of Murray, Kentucky, suggested that nothing could be more appropriate than a high chair. And Donald K. Fry of Char-

lottesville, Virginia, said there shouldn't be any table at all. "If the talks were held standing up," he wrote, "surely the negotiators would tire of the whole business and draw the conference to a speedy close."

I suspect the time is going to come, many wearying months from now, when someone will wish he'd listened a bit more closely to that sort of common sense.

Tip of the week: For some fascinating glimpses into politics behind the scenes, get David Halberstam's new book, *The Unfinished Odyssey of Robert Kennedy* (see page 29). I was especially interested in Halberstam's descriptions of the

advice Kennedy got and the advice he acted on. Once, for example, during his wearying campaign for the Presidential nomination, he asked a friend whether all the speeches and the handshaking were really worth it. Couldn't it, he asked, all be done on television? No, replied his aide Dick Goodwin. "You have to go out there and do it all and you have to show that you don't have contempt for them, that you value who they are."

And then someone else, unidentified in Mr. Halberstam's book, said: "You could afford to do more by television if you weren't rich. You're too rich not to get out there and mix."

That, as we know, was advice that Senator Kennedy didn't argue with.

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MARC CONNELLY:
VOICES OFFSTAGE

Bernard Shaw's . . . main course . . . was, a mixture of peas, potatoes, and nuts, perhaps, under a whitish cream sauce. The soft food had enabled Shaw to do almost all the talking since we arrived. I wondered if I had found a secondary reason for his vegetarianism.