

TOP OF MY HEAD

The New Person

by Goodman Ace

A MAN WRITES: "I have read SR for many years because it has kept me fully informed. I wish I could say the same for your strange columns, in which I can never find the point you are trying to make, if indeed you had a point to start with."

Well, sir, I can take friendly criticism like that as well as the next nervously insecure columnist—with a grain of aspirin. The irony is that as a writer I have always been in the forefront of the crusade to keep the reader fully informed. In fact, if I were a newspaper, my masthead would proudly proclaim: A FULLY INFORMED READER IS A FULLY INFORMED READER.

So, under that high-flying banner, from this moment on and continuing consecutively at least to my next column, I will attempt to fully inform you, sir. No sweat. Easy as splitting that infinitive. If it's full information you want, sir, today you've come to the right window.

However, before I get into that, I hope you will agree with me that all columnists can't be Russell Baker. The more garrulous of us eventually settle for being Russell Long. Quite often, halfway through writing a column, I find I have used up the full font of my full information and must filibuster my way through the rest of my space.

Not anymore. Today you will find me a changed man—even more

changed than Jimmy Carter (President of the United States... of America). Full enough? No? All right, let's pick a subject. For instance, "Books." Have you wondered how come so many books have been written in prison lately? I'm glad you asked me. Answer: For openers, writing books in prison serves one good purpose. It shuts up a lot of nonwriters who go around saying, "The story of my life would make a great book, if only I had the time to write it." The solution: "Commit a crime and some judge will give you the time" (joke).

But seriously, folks, you too, sir, writing books in prison is not a recent gambit. The author I recall most clearly and fondly was jailed at the turn of the century. He was one of my all-time favorites. His name was Bill Porter. Who he? Okay. To inform you more fully, his full name was William Sydney Porter. Ring a bell? You don't hear anything? I press on. He was born in 1862, in Greensboro, N.C. (North Carolina). As a young man he wandered around, working at several odd jobs until, in 1884, he got a job as a bank teller in Austin, Tex. (Texas).

I hope, sir, you're paying close attention, because I'm reading all of this from a very heavy book in my lap. It says here that a shortage in the bank's funds was discovered and that Bill Porter was convicted and sentenced to

three years in prison—from 1898 to 1901—where he began writing short stories, each of which had a surprise ending. He didn't write under his own name. He used a nom de plume (French. Translation: "name of the pen"). He started writing in the penitentiary, hence the derivative, "pen name."

Still not full enough? Okay, here's one last clue I hoped I wouldn't have to use. Porter came to New York in 1902 and became so popular they named a candy bar after him. Now, if there are still some readers who haven't guessed his pen name, you will never hear it from me or see it in this column. I'm sorry. No, I'm not. This big book in my lap is getting so heavy it may injure me permanently.

On a footnote of comfort for Mr. Porter's fans, I should add that he was later exonerated—no cash shortage. This miscarriage of justice was committed by what was then known as a "hanging judge," who allowed a defendant to plead guilty or innocent. Period. That was justice at the turn of the century. Today, justice is more sophisticated. To the menu of pleas have been added items like "nolo contendere," "mea culpa," and, for all I know, "amo, amas, amat"—all little trapdoors through which a defendant can escape with a minimal sentence and live forever after with his family and his conscience. Also, the "hanging judge" has been replaced by the "judge who will throw the book at you."

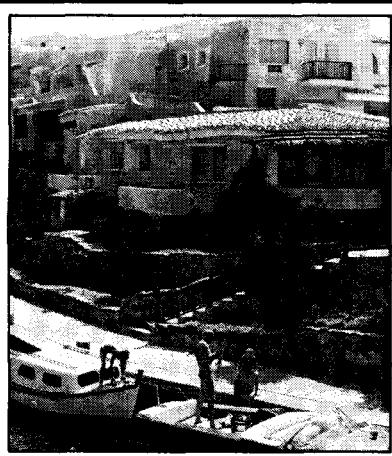
This kind of justice was seen in the trials of our most recent group of prison authors—Haldeman, Ehrlichman, etc. (et cetera). The process works something like this: The judge who will throw the book at you tells the defendant to approach the bench and softly asks him how long it will take him to write his book. He sentences him accordingly. Then he says, "I've always thought my life's story would make a great book.... If only I had the time to write it."

And that, sir, is a reasonable facsimile, in the classic style of a William Sydney Porter surprise finish. ●



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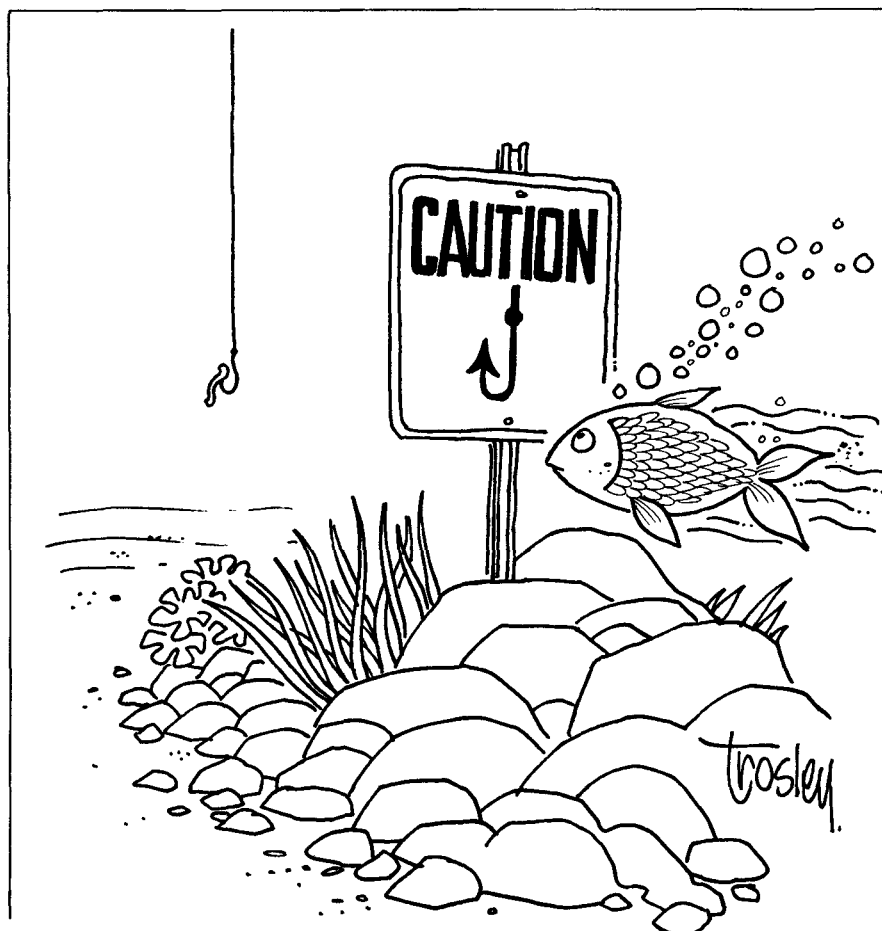
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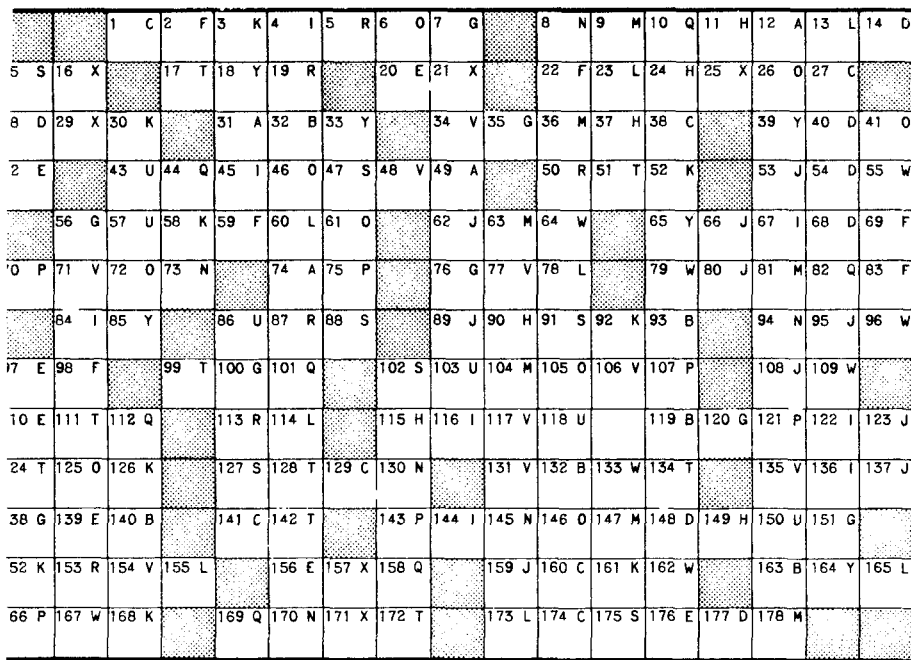
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DOUBLE-CROSTIC

Number 146

by Thomas H. Middleton



Instructions

If you've never solved one of these puzzles, it will probably look much more difficult than it actually is. If you can answer only a few of the WORDS correctly, you're on your way to solving the puzzle. Fill in the numbered blanks of all the WORDS you can guess and write the letter of each numbered blank in its correspondingly numbered square in the diagram. The letters printed in the upper-right-hand corners of the squares indicate from what WORD a particular square's letter comes.

The diagram, when filled in, should read as a quotation from a published work. The dark squares are the spaces between words. If there is no dark square at the end of a line, a word may carry over to the line below.

The first letter of each WORD, reading down, will spell the name of the author and the title of the work from which the quotation is taken.

You should find yourself seeing words and phrases taking form in the diagram; so you can work back and forth, from WORDS to diagram and from diagram to WORDS, until the diagram is filled in.

Answer to *Double-Crostic No. 145* appears on page 45.

CLUES

WORDS

- A. Daughter of Zeus and Hera; wife of Hercules 31 49 74 12
- J. Pass away silently, as time; slip by 93 119 132 163 140 32
- C. Measuring worms, inchworms 129 141 160 174 1 27 38
- D. Accumulation of broken ice in a river 40 148 28 54 68 177 14
- E. Aggregate of minute aquatic organisms in the surface film of a body of water 20 42 97 110 139 156 176
- F. "Thine only son, Isaac, whom thou ____" (Gen. 22:2) 2 22 59 69 83 98
- G. Healthy nutrition 100 138 151 7 35 56 76 120
- H. Swordfish 149 11 90 115 37 24
- I. Capital of Kiangsi, southeast China 45 84 116 122 136 4 67 144
- J. Son and successor of Saul (II Sam. 2-4) 66 89 123 95 137 159 53 80 108 62
- K. "But for mine own part, it was _____," says Casca (3 wds., *Julius Caesar*) 126 152 168 3 92 30 58 161 52
- L. "Old man" in England; pater 155 173 13 60 78 114 165 23

CLUES

WORDS

- M. Fright; mess; unpleasant sight 63 178 81 104 9 36 147
- N. Seldom 8 94 145 170 130 73
- O. Cleared up, settled (2 wds.) 105 41 6 125 146 61 26 46 72
- P. Household linen 121 143 166 107 70 75
- Q. Reached to a great height, stood high 158 10 169 44 101 112 82
- R. Play by James Elroy Flecker 87 153 19 50 113 5
- S. City in central Sudan (2 wds.) 88 15 91 127 175 47 102
- T. Cisco or lake herring 17 99 124 172 111 142 128 134 51
- U. French painter (1780-1867; "Recumbent Odalisque") 118 150 43 57 103 86
- V. Low-grade, machine-finished paper used in journalism 48 77 34 135 131 106 71 154 117
- W. Cartoon feature created by humorist Roger Price 55 64 96 109 79 167 162 133
- X. Daily production, yield 21 29 16 171 157 25
- Y. Marine fish of the family Labridae 39 33 18 85 65 164