(EDITOR'S NOTE: The purpose of this section is to acquaint readers with books of recent vintage, currently in print, and holding special interest for word lovers. All books will be reviewed from the special standpoint of recreational linguistics.)


One of the many facets of recreational linguistics is the collection of nouns of multitude: special terms for groups of animals and birds, most of them dating back to the 14th and 15th centuries and still surviving in the language of today. Thus, we speak colorfully of a pride of lions, a murmuration of starlings, a shrewdness of apes, an exaltation of larks, a clowder of cats, a piteousness of turtledoves, etc., etc.

Mr. Wildsmith has addressed himself to nouns of multitude describing mammals in this book. Generally, two facing pages are allotted to each term, with a highly imaginative and attractive picture of the term spread across those pages.

The book is intended primarily for children. Accordingly, the print is large, the pictures are colorful, and the scope of the book is limited: there are only 18 illustrations. From the viewpoint of word hobbyists, the $4.95 price tag on the book definitely places it in the category of a luxury item, suitable as a gift.

There is one further point to be noted: some of the terms illustrated are unknown to word experts. Examples of coined group terms from Wildsmith the Wordsmith: a nursery of racoons; an ambush of tigers; a corps of giraffes; an array of hedgehogs.


Eric Partridge, best known for his monumental works dealing with English slang and etymology, has also written a number of lesser works. One of them, COMIC ALPHABETS, first published in England in 1961 and now made available to the American public, deals with a recreational aspect of language almost unknown in the United States.

WORD WAYS
BOOK REVIEWS

A comic alphabet, for the benefit of the uninitiated, is a series of phrases or thoughts, in prose or in verse, running through the entire alphabet, illustrating each letter of the alphabet in turn. The origin of the comic alphabet may have been in attempts to teach young children the alphabetic sequence with verses such as:

“A is for an Apple, an Archer, an Arrow;
B is for a Bull, a Bear, and a Barrow,

etc., etc.”

Irrespective of its origin, a subject thoroughly explored by Partridge, the English comic alphabet has become an instrument for playing with words, displaying elements of the naively humorous, the ingenious, and the genuinely witty, reaching a high degree of sophistication. A partial example of what you may expect to find in Partridge’s generous collection of alphabets:

A for ism (= aphorism)
B for mutton (= beef or mutton)
C for th’ Highlanders (= Seaforth Highlanders)
D for ential (= deferential)
E for brick (= ‘ave a brick)
F for vescence (= effervescence)
G for police (= chief of police)
H for retirement (= age for retirement)
I for lutin (= highfalutin)
J for oranges (= jaffa oranges)
K for ancis (= Kay Francis)

Most of the alphabets cited by Partridge abound in word play, usually of the phonetic variety. There are, however, all sorts of other alphabets included or at least mentioned: communications alphabets, children’s alphabets, ribald and obscene alphabets, Old English pre-comic alphabetism, and others.

We recommend the book as a curious sidelight on a specifically British form of word play.


In 1925, the “Daily News” Publications Department in London published a slender volume entitled The World’s Best Word Puzzles. The author was Henry Ernst Dudeney, one of Britain’s foremost puzzlers, best known for his work in the field of mathematical recreations, but also highly competent in the realm of word puzzles. The book lived up to its title without any doubt. Different chapters were devoted to such subjects as acrostics, charades, word squares, palindromes, anagrams, rebuses, cryptograms, buried, missing and ex-

THE JOURNAL OF RECREATIONAL LINGUISTICS
panding words, rings and chains of words, and even crossword puzzles, among others. A total of 218 individual puzzles was included, with solutions to all of them.

Although much time has passed since its publication, and copies of the book are no longer easy to obtain, Dudeney's classic has had few challengers. Written by a master, it has an inimitable, delightful quality of its own that no one else has been able to duplicate.

Now, Scribner's has brought out a new edition of Dudeney's masterpiece, under the direction of Martin Gardner, the "Mathematical Games" Editor of the Scientific American. The number of individual puzzles and problems has been increased to 300 by adding to each chapter word puzzles from a posthumous work by Dudeney, A Puzzle-Mine. For the benefit of American readers, the entire text has been "lightly" edited. A comparison of the just published book with the original work confirms that editorial changes have been minor, indeed.

Dudeney's work, in its expanded form, remains one of the basic texts of recreational linguistics. As such, it is highly recommended to readers of WORDWAYS.


The author, a long-time member of the American Name Society, has now released to the world a part of his accumulated lore about names—names of persons, not of places. He has adopted as a convenient format something intermediate between a comprehensive dictionary and a short encyclopedia. Whatever aspect of names you may be interested in, you will find an article about it, or a suitable cross-reference, in this book, all of it arranged in alphabetical order. Thus, the reader may consult the book like a dictionary to learn what there is to know about American Indian Names, Early Babylonian Names, Initials Forming a Word, Last Names Alphabetically, Metronymics, Naming Baby, Numbers Instead of Names, Palindromes, Pet Names for Wives, Remembering Names, Ryukyuan Names, Sissy Names, Spelling Variations, Teknonymy, Unfortunate Names, Use of First Names, and innumerable other subjects pertinent to the names of human beings.

The reference work format is only a superficial one, of course. Actually, the book is a compilation of a great deal of information about names—useful, interesting, odd, humorous, unbelievable. The way to find out what is in the book is to read it, from first page to last. Even casual browsing through its pages is a rewarding experience. It takes only minutes to run across items such as these:

The name of GOMULKA, first secretary of the Communist party in Poland, means "head of cheese." The real name of DESI ARNAZ is "Desiderio Alberto Arnaz de Acha III." A group of Detroit bachelors rented an apartment, listing themselves for several years in the phone book under the collective name of ZEKE ZZZPT. They were eventually outdone in lastness by another group using the name of King Pate.

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Francisco SPONDGES
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BOOK REVIEWS

Some Americans believe that if you answer when you hear your name called by a ghost, you will probably die. A native policeman in Fiji, British Polynesia, has a surname spelled with 130 letters (not reproduced here because the effort involved in spelling it correctly would knock us out). If the former wife of King Farouk were to marry the former governor of New York, her name would be the pleasantly rhyming NARRIMAN HARRIMAN. A judge in San Francisco denied the request of Mr. THARNMIDSBE LURY PRAGHUST-SPONDGIFGEM to change his name to the more suitable MISWALDPORT-NGHEUSTFICSET BALSTEMDRIEGHSOINTPLUSLOF WRADVAL-STPLONDQUESKYCRUFEMGLISH. (Is this for real??)

Fascinating as the book is, we are not fully convinced of the authenticity of all the information in it, although our skepticism can be dismissed as merely personal prejudice. You see, on Page 17, in an article on Anagrams, the editor of WORD WAYS mentioned, his name being given there as DAVID A. of WORD BORGMANNI. In spite of this damning fault, we recommend this book to our readers.


Here is a book intended to appeal to advocates of Esperanto, Interlingua, and other world languages. Rather than introduce an entire new language, Mr. Weller proposes a much more modest beginning: let all languages adopt a new, logical, and uniform set of names for numbers, both cardinal and ordinal. The author argues, quite plausibly, that if speakers of different languages can use the same numerals in writing numbers, why not the same names in speaking them?

The book sets forth a set of number names derived from the names current in the principal Western European languages, possessing the virtues of logical construction and greater shortness than that of the names in any existing language. The nomenclature devised by Mr. Weller covers all numbers from zero to the septillion. Apparently, the author has made the assumption that numbers greater than the septillion are seldom talked about.

Whatever merits the proposed nomenclature has, it is doomed to failure. Men simply aren’t ready to internationalize their language yet, whether in whole or in part. The most that can be said for the book is that it is an interesting, but minor, addition to the already extensive literature concerning universal languages. The author’s prefatory claim that he is introducing a simplified number system is not borne out by the subsequent text: only the names of numbers are to be universalized, with no change whatever in their arithmetic.

The book is handsomely printed, in unusually large type, with much space between successive lines. Set in ordinary print, the text would not occupy more than 25 or 30 pages. Accordingly, the retail price of $4.25 is out of proportion to the material offered.

THE JOURNAL OF RECREATIONAL LINGUISTICS

the name ZOLF ZZPFT. A popular man’s name in Yugoslavia is HYACINTHE.

185