

TO THE FAIR FLUKE!

M. H. GREENBLATT
Princeton, New Jersey

Captain Ahab put the spyglass down on the ship's table with a grunt of satisfaction. There was no doubt about it; the indistinct pale shape on the starboard horizon was Moby Dick. Was his long search at an end? Hastily he uncorked a bottle of rum and poured its contents into a tumbler. Raising this in the direction of the distant whale, he murmured to himself "A toast - to the fair fluke!"

To the fair fluke . . . what is unusual about this phrase? Before reading the following paragraphs, the reader is asked to identify a possible next word in the series to, the, fair, fluke, . . .

A casual inspection of this series suggests that it is a rhopalism; that is, each word contains one more letter than the word preceding it. However, this is not enough to make it worthy of note. The first and last letters of the two-letter word are identical with the first and last letters of two, the first and last letters of the three-letter word are identical with the first and last letters of three, and so on. In other words, we are asked to find next a six-letter word with first letter S and last letter X. Such words are not difficult to find -- the common ones sphinx, surtax, suffix and syntax come immediately to mind, and a perusal of the unabridged dictionary yields syrinx, storax, spadix, scolex, sandix and smilax. Capitalized words include Sussex, Styrax and Spalax.

How much farther can one go? The following words are all in Webster's Unabridged Dictionary, Second Edition:

station, elephant, negotiate, tabulation, examination,
transmigrate, transposition, fraternization, familiarization,
spiritualization, supercolumniation, electrocoagulation,
n-----n, transubstantiatively, transubstantiationite, . . .

Can anyone find a nineteen-letter word beginning and ending with N?