

NUTS

MAXEY BROOKE
Sweeny, Texas

It began innocently enough. Phil was sitting at his desk chewing something.

"What are you eating?" asked Don who shared the small office.

"Pecans."

"Well, nuts to you!" said Don.

That should have ended it. But, later in the day, Phil complained of a headache.

"Go see Florence Nightingale," suggested Don.

"Nurse to you," said Phil. The game had started.

Next day, Phil leaned back in his chair and took a piece of string from his pocket. First he tied a bowline, then a sheepshank, and finally a carrick bend.

Don watched for a minute or two, then remarked, "Knots to you."

A couple of days later, Don said "I'm going to leave early. I want to go by the pet shop and pick up a couple of salamanders for my aquarium."

"OK," replied Phil, "newts to you."

One afternoon as they were walking from their office to the parking lot, Phil slapped at the air and exclaimed "Dang little bugs!"

Don looked around. "What bugs? -- Oh! Gnats to you."

Don continued the bug motif next day. He was busy figuring when suddenly he threw down his pencil and muttered disgustedly "Lice eggs!"

Phil continued to work for a minute or two. Then he looked up and grinned. "Nits to you."

Almost a week passed. Phil was cleaning out his desk drawers. He had lined up a bunch of odds and ends that he had accumulated.

He looked at them and murmured "Potpourri."

Don walked over and looked at them. Then he said softly "Knicks to you and knacks to you."

They both smiled. It was a rare double-barreled one.

The end came one evening. They were sitting in a bar discussing boyhood games. "What was your favorite marble game?" Don asked.

"I don't know," replied Phil. "We drew a big ring, everyone put a marble in the center, and we tried to shoot them out. What was your favorite?"

Don laughed triumphantly. "Knucks to you!"

He had won the game.

SPOONERISMS

Many people know that spoonerisms ("the Lord is a shoving leopard" in place of "the Lord is a loving shepherd") are named after Rev. William Archibald Spooner, an Oxford don for nearly 60 years. However, it is not clear how many spoonerisms can be reliably attributed to him; as Toynbee says, the wittier or more elegant the specimen, the less likely it is to be authentic. The January 1977 Scientific American cites a study by John M. Potter (in the Proceedings of the Royal Society of Medicine), who examined the types of errors that occur in Spooner's manuscripts, diaries and letters. He found that Spooner's non-spelling errors were quite unusual: far fewer than normal were anticipations (words inserted too early) or perseverations (words inserted too late), and the others were a "hotch-potch of transpositions, contaminations and substitutions". Potter speculated that these written abnormalities may be evidence of an organic disorder, which may also have been responsible for his verbal eccentricities.