THE TEN-SQUARE: A TRIBUTE

TED CLARKE Newquay, Cornwall, England

It's known that for one hundred years Puzzlists strove for what appears Could not be done within the span The Good Lord had alloted man.

It may seem odd (to some, absurd) To see them searching for a word Which, placed within a grid's top row, Allowed the other rows below

To take those words which would be valid And read across and down, and tallied Rows with columns, top to toe, And left to right in order, so

The top row's word would also read Down column one; then they'd proceed To row and column X the same Till they had finished with this game.

The final X, in this game's case, Has really put them in their place. So far, they've managed really fine With grid squares not exceeding nine,

But grid squares of the order ten Have made the formists think again. They may, in fact, have to admit They've not much chance of making it.

The ten-square seems so convolute, With certain facts not in dispute, The best computers of the world, At this problem bravely hurled,

May need a full quadrillion years To run through all successive tiers Of permutations from the list Of valid words which now exist.

The fifty thousand words or more Within a valid word-list's store Do not appear to be enough To satisfy the ten-square buff.

Some are straining eyes and wrists In typing words to swell their lists, But ever-longer lists might lead To ever-greater time to read.

Such Sisyphean effort goes To swell esteem for all of those Who've almost formed a perfect square And yet had no computer there.

The late Dmitri Borgmann's name Already's in the Hall of Fame; Although he only managed seven, He earned his place in wordplay's Heaven.

LOST WORDS OF LOVE

In Poplollies and Bellibones and Tenderfeet and Ladyfingers, Susan Kelz Sperling established herself as the champion of the obsolete word, resurrecting many from the dusty archives of the OED and placing them in contemporary settings. In Lost Words of Love (Clarkson Potter, 1993; \$14) she charmingly focuses on love and marriage. Here one can learn what advice Millicent Aimcrier, the Ann Landers of yesteryear, gives to the lovelorn; one can eavesdrop on love letters between Romeo and Juliet, or Odysseus and Penelope; or one can tune in a TV interview a la Johnny Carson or Jay Leno. Sperling is especially clever at parodying Ecclesiastes:

A time to TIDDER, and a time to WROX,

A time to NURRY, and a time to RAFF VIRGIDITY ...

and Elizabeth Barrett Browning:

How do I love thee? Let me count thy FEAKS; I love thee to the FOUNCE and breadth and height My soul can GREEP...

Her poetry rivals that of Willard Espy, who, in an earlier preface in one of her books, lamented that "words obsolete are mighty hard to rhyme". Not necessarily so!

At DEAD-LIFT and POTVALIANT, still I SNIRP; Shall I COURT HOLY WATER? Chance a WURP?