

Results of competition No. 3

Examples of momentous discoveries happened upon by chance proved disappointing, and no first prize has been awarded. Consolation prizes go to the authors of the stories printed below, although one contains a historical inaccuracy.

"And now, allow me to demonstrate my new, cheap, thin-wire, glass enclosed heater", said Edison, slowly closing the switch. The ammeter flicked over and the lab. was lit up by a flickering glow. "Of course this is just to show the principle", he added heartily. "The production model will have opaque glass walls and a heat efficiency better than 80%".
D. R. REED

It is said that Arne Tiselius developed cellulose column chromatography from an ancient practice of Swedish peasants. While on holiday in the forests of western Sweden he came across an old woodcutter who, to prepare lunch, broke the ends off a long loaf of bread, stood the truncated part upright in a jar, and poured into the top of it a crude distillate of pulped leaves; the woodcutter ate his crusts after dipping them into the liquid which eventually filtered into the jar, and gave his dog the rest of the loaf. Realising that he had witnessed an ingenious method of separating ethyl and methyl alcohols, Tiselius returned to his laboratory pondering on how to apply it to the purification of proteins.
D. ROSEN

It is reported that Gregor Mendel once made a courtesy visit to a neighbouring nunnery. A keen gardener himself, he was much impressed by the magnificent sweet pea beds leading to the main entrance. The gardener, a tall, handsome, young red-haired man (rare in those parts of Moravia), accepted Mendel's compliment as nothing less than his due.

The abbess showed Mendel around, and was particularly enthusiastic about the success of their orphanage and school. Mendel, however, was more taken with the surprisingly large number of tall, pretty, red-haired children attending. "Strange", he thought to himself . . .

F. H. COOPER (after BOCCACCIO)

"Get back here and put some clothes on!" shouted Mrs Archimedes.

By that time, however, her husband was halfway to the palace, and Mrs Archimedes was left standing ankle-deep in spilled bathwater. How could she possibly clean that mess? Suddenly she noticed that the hem of her gown was soaking up some of the spillover. With a shout of "Eureka!", she quickly tore up some old clothes, tied them to a stick, and invented the mop.

S. GILBERT

Competition No. 4

One of the most popular sections of *Nature* is 100 Years Ago. Readers are invited to submit 100 words culled from the pages of *Nature* 100 years hence. Closing date: February 1, 1976.

Ghost lecturers

When Professor Richard Eakin's lectures declined in popularity and audiences dwindled, he hit upon a topping wheeze. To revitalise his course in elementary biology he would bring in guest lecturers of exceeding eminence—Mendel, Darwin, Pasteur and their ilk. Being a thorough worker, and having at his disposal the considerable resources of the University of California, Berkeley, he has been able to transmogrify himself into various scientists who long since passed into the annals of history.

Thus when it is time to discourse on blood, an Elizabethan gentleman steps forth, carrying a Latin treatise, a heart and a pitcher of tomato juice. He is William Harvey and the props serve to demonstrate his work on the circulation of the blood. Later during the course of thirty lectures (most of which are delivered by Professor Eakin playing himself) Harvey is followed by William Beaumont, the gruff nineteenth-century American army surgeon who pioneered the investigation of gastric juice and digestion. He holds forth with some relish about his investigations with his patient, and later guinea pig, Alexis St Martin, a fur trapper whose stomach was shot open and remained open through the wall of his abdomen even after his recovery.

Embryology is introduced by a frock coated Herr Professor Dr Hans Spemann, the only character in Eakin's repertoire whom he knew. Genetics is brought into the course by a jolly, cigar smoking Brother Gregor Mendel, complete with plastic sweet peas (always fresh and available). To add authenticity to his portrayal of Louis Pasteur, Eakin has taken lessons in the art of affecting a French accent. He is apparently acquiring the Queen's English to improve his interpretations of Harvey and Darwin.

After their local success, the guest lectures have now been published in a book with the alluring title of *Great Scientists Speak Again* (by Richard M. Eakin, University of California Press, Berkeley, Los Angeles, London, 1975, £4.50). Other biologists eager to give the best attended lectures are invited to get out their grease paint, wigs and pitchers of tomato juice.
M.L.

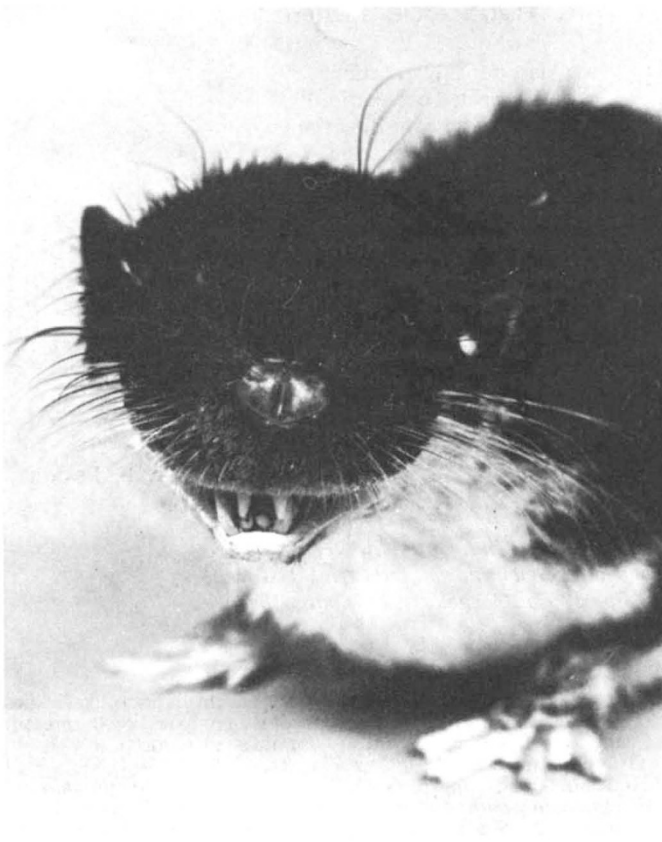


Photo by A. Friday

This vicious beast was caught by natives in deepest Zaïre on behalf of two British zoologists who risked disease and discomfort to secure a sample of its blood. In spite of its fearsome appearance, this West African otter shrew, here slightly larger than life, is stuffed and safely at rest in the Museum of Zoology at Cambridge (see *Nature*, 258, 107; 1975).