Green Dragon

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First, a correction... in my last column I wrote about the Boggle Shop, not the Boffle Shop. It was a typo on my part and its publication as such was my fault in that I did not get the manuscript proofread before mailing it to Glen.

Today I want to talk about some mail I have gotten, starting with a communication from Professor Tolkien himself.

Last year I had had the opportunity to write him and I took advantage of the opportunity to ask him a question I had been wondering about for some time. It first grew out of a conversation with Dick Plotz a number of years ago. Dozen and gross play a very important role in Middle-earth, far more important than in our society. Could it be that a duo-decimal number system was in use? And if so how did it originate? Did the elves have twelve fingers perchance? To this speculation of Dick's I had a question of my own... how were the numbers written? Was it a positional notation like the Arabic numerals we use, or was it more like the Roman system which had different symbols for two, twenty, two hundred, etc?

Professor Tolkien was kind enough to answer my questions. The elves had ten fingers, like men, and initially used a decimal numerical system. But as soon as they realized the superiority of the duodecimal system they developed and used that too, and both were in use in Middle-earth. The notation was positional, but backwards compared to ours... the smallest number coming first and the largest last... like our archaic way of saying "four and twenty" rather than twenty four, and so writing that number 42, not 24.

He had invented twelve special symbols for the numbers zero to eleven, but hadn't referred to them in many years and the papers with his notes were no longer accessible. The first ten of these were used when decimal notation was in use. He promised to send me a copy if he came across these papers.

If you want more information on duodecimal numbers I would suggest getting in touch with the Duodecimal Society IF it still exists. I had been interested when I was in high school and had gotten a number of issues of the Duodecimal Bulletin though I had not joined the society. They were promoting as a reform the universal adoption of the duodecimal number system. For counting they had suggested using etc for what we call ten, el for eleven and do for twelve. Thirteen would be called do-one and would be written "11" which means one dozen plus one. (In decimal notation 11 means one ten plus one.) They suggested use of X for ten, and a funny E ( ) for eleven. Twelve would of course be written 10. A dozen dozen, or gross, would be shortened to gro and written 100, while a dozen dozen dozen is a myriad and written 1000. Unfortunately my copies of the Duodecimal Bulletin are buried among tons of other papers at my mother's home in New York and I have no way of locating them. I seem to remember that the Duodecimal Society was located in Staten Island. Anyone out there know whether it still exists and what its address is?

I suppose that his notes on numbers were among the things Professor Tolkien had referred to when he spoke in the initial edition of LotR of a possible but improbable additional volume of supplementary materials. Of course I am most eager to read The Silmarillion and Akallabeth and any other narrative material dealing with Middle-earth, including incomplete or abandoned fragments... but could it be done my ideal dream would call for all these to be published and then all the other materials concerning Middle-earth, its languages, technologies, customs, and the like.

Anyhow, it is possible to speculate at length on a number of aspects of Middle-earth, such as the level of technology that would produce glass and tinnerboxes... both of which require a fair amount of technical sophistication. And since they spoke of brandy they must have had a still. Does Farmer Maggot's cart assume the existence of the horse collar? My knowledge of the history of technology in this Fourth Age is a bit vague here. I understand that the horse collar is a medieval invention, but there were chariots and other horse-drawn vehicles even in Biblical times.

I keep wondering about things like these, and know that few if any of these questions will be answered by The Silmarillion. Of course I want to see the latter more than anything else, but I would like to see answers to the former too.

I have heard from a number of people connected with the TSA about various activities and doings elsewhere.

Nan Scott, whose paper from TOLKON I (Flycon) was in the final Tolkien Journal, spent the last year in England where her husband was doing some research at the British Museum and other libraries. While there she was, of course, involved in Tolkien-related activities. In one letter she wrote,

"We just formed the North Farthing Smial. Not that all of the members in North London, but Vera Chapman, alias Belladonna Took, the society's 74-year-old secretary, is. We organized at a party at her flat. The idea is to keep the Smials down to 7 or 8 members each for serious discussions, the reading of papers, etc. once a month, as opposed to the more social In-moots.' At the first meeting here it was fun to make out a map, 'up the Greenway (Kentish Town Rd) to Deedan's Dike, noting local hazards that --the local pub, 'the farmhouse', "here the topless ladies'," and so on.

C. K. Cook read a paper on the Tolkien Cult, I read my old Beekamp'68 "War and Pacifism" piece from the Tolkien Journal since Charles Head alone of the group had seen it. In March we'll hear Jessica on Tolkien and Wagner. I hope Archie Mercer will come up from Cornwall for the AGM. The London Tolkien crowd is really very welcoming and delightful."

In a cassette-letter Archie Mercer spoke of the use of "Green Dragon" as a pub name in England, in response to mention of the same in one of the final issues of the Green Dragon as a mimeographed magazine. He said:

'Now I don't think that you're aware that 'The
Legolas and Gimli at Helm's Deep

Green Dragon' is quite a common pub name. Of course this is the sort of case where I ought to be able to put my finger on a dozen of them, but I can't even put my finger on one. If one saw a pub called 'The Green Dragon' one would think 'how commonplace a name!' because it is. 'The Green Dragon', 'The Georgian Dragon', 'The Kings Arms', 'The King's Head', 'The Queen's Arms' or head, 'The Crown and Anchor', 'The Royal Oak', 'Coach and Horses', 'Fox and Goose' and of course 'The New Inn.' They are all very common pub names. I don't think I've ever heard of a 'Prancing Pony' outside of The Lord of the Rings though. In fact, as regards the commonness of 'The Green Dragon' it's mentioned in the first chapter of Chesterton's Flying Inn, where a great play is taken with quite a number of common pub names. 'The Sarsen's Head' is another one that comes in in that context.

I seem to be using this installment to catch up on my correspondence...that's all I write about. But I ought to mention one other letter from a former TSA member; this letter about a year old. It's from Jan Finder who is now in Germany and who wrote:

"I was in Stuttgart to speak to the German publishers of The Lord of the Rings. It is not selling well and they wanted advice in how to hyper sales, especially on the new paperback edition scheduled to appear in the fall. My basic feeling was that $35 for the books was a hell of a lot of money. Moreover, 12 bucks for the paperback was also too steep. We did kick around some ideas but I don't think it will help as long as the books cost so much."

A Note on an Unpublished (and Probably Unwritten) Collaboration
by J.R. Christopher

In Chad Walsh's C.S. Lewis: Apostle to the Skeptics (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1949), p. 10, it is mentioned that The Student Christian Movement Press had announced the forthcoming publication of a collaboration by C. S. Lewis and J. R. R. Tolkien: Language and Human Nature (a fascinating title). But Dr. Walsh reveals that this book is still in the blueprint stage. (Tolkien, by the way, is referred to as "Prof. F. R. R. Tolkien.")


Since the Greeks did not reckon time by Calends, and since Lewis and Tolkien are both dead, the volume is fated never to appear. Perhaps part of what Lewis would have contributed appears in his Studies in Words (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, Second Edition with Three New Chapters, 1967). Perhaps part of what Tolkien would have contributed appears in his "English and Welsh" (in Angles and Britons (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1963) pp. 1-41). But one cannot help wondering what the relationship between language and human nature is especially one which would interest the Student Christian Movement Press.