

# At home with the Tome

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When my neighbour's son asked me at which place Friday comes before Thursday, I knew it was a trick question. But I pretended to be stumped and he came out with the answer: Dictionary.

The dictionary is a guide to correct spelling of words provided you know to spell them correctly in the first place. The dictionary says that a dictionary is a book containing the words of a language alphabetically arranged with their meanings, etymology, and even pronunciation. No home is a home without this tome, which is a store house of word power.

For one thing the tome has an impressive fullness in any book shelf. There are those who use it occasionally to make sure 'occasion' has only one 's' and not two. There are others who

delve deep into it searching for jaw-breakers like: floccinaucinihilipilification. It was rather a disappointment to learn that all that this sesqui-pedalianism meant was 'of little or no value'. The opportunity to impress others by using it in some context or other has been eluding me but I have not given up trying. (My wife tells me "you have done it just now").

The section on 'foreign words and phrases' in the dictionary is fascinating. The trouble here is pronunciation. One can make an ass of himself trying to use (R)epondez S(il)(V)ous (P)lait unless he knows the correct pronunciation. It is much simpler to say 'Reply please' and be done with it... There is a rich slew of foreign words to suit different occasions, specially if one wants to sound pompuous. Words like

Pro Bono Publico and Vox Populi have been beaten to frazzle in the LTTE (Letters To The Editor) columns of newspapers. With modern writers, barring Book reviewers, the use of Latin and French expressions is, it appears, er, passe.

On a personal note, I was on the look out for a pseudonym with a foreign flavour for my name when I stumbled upon 'Auriga' meaning charioteer. I almost felt like going to the bathtub and shouting Auriga! like Eureka, a la Archimides, but then I realised, I had no bathtub.

Another section of the dictionary which is absorbing is the one on abbreviations, the abbreviation of which is abbrev. I found that AEIOU is not merely a string of vowels but is the abbrev. of Austriae Est

Imperare Orbi Universo. I didn't bother to know its meaning because there was no way I was going to be caught using it.

If anyone wants to address a letter to an Ambassador (there are so many at large), the dictionary is the right place to look for guidance. But do not be surprised to learn that the correct form is a mere 'Sir'.

There are many uncommon uses for the dictionary. One can hide currency notes in it or use it as prop for the leg of a broken stool or even as a paper weight. I found an unusual use for it when a neighbour's cat after depredation in my kitchen tried to slither away. I flung the readily handy dictionary at it with all my might. I missed the cat by yards and sprained my wrist. Yes, the dictionary can sometimes fail you.