

# Letters

## Epigrammata

In "Atom detection improves, on the surface" (SN: 8/18/84, p. 101), you cited a "famous theologian" in reference to the motto *Abusus non tollit usum*. I would greatly appreciate it if you could furnish me with the full reference for this motto.

Robert Sovner, M.D.  
Cambridge, Mass.

*It's attributed to Thomas Aquinas, but I cannot cite chapter and verse. It is so widely quoted in discussions of moral philosophy that it has gotten into Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary as a Latin proverb without attribution.*

—D.E. Thomsen

In "Fractional Hall Effect by Electrons in Chorus" (SN: 8/25/84, p. 116), you attribute to "a famous British physicist" the response "What use is a newborn baby?"

In an 1864 biography of Benjamin Franklin by James Parton, the response is attributed to Franklin, on the authority of the memoirs of a Baron de Grimm. Who was your man?

Arthur J. Morgan  
New York, N.Y.

*I was thinking of either Faraday or Lord Kelvin, but it may have been Franklin. All three were good at one liners. One evening at dinner, James A. McNeill Whistler, who was famous for wit as well as for his frugality in using his mother as an artist's model, delivered a striking epigram. Oscar Wilde remarked, "I wish I had said that." Whistler replied, "You will, Oscar, you will."*

—D.E. Thomsen

## The wave wasn't tidal

I particularly enjoyed "Ancient Quake Shakes Up the Past" (SN: 8/18/84, p. 100) and look forward to further reports on the findings as the excavation progresses. I was, however, distressed to see a scientific publication use the common, but in this application erroneous, term "tidal wave" to refer to what is correctly called a seismic sea wave or tsunami.

Peggy Brutsche  
Coordinator, Earthquake Preparedness  
American Red Cross  
Los Angeles, Calif.

## 'Poison' inspires poetry

The inference of Panasiuk and Bills ("Beware the sprouts of sorghum," SN: 8/18/84, p. 109), as to the lethality of sorghum sprouts in particular and hydrocyanic acid (HCN) in general, struck the heart of this poet — to the core. The muse gave me no rest until I produced at least a moderately general rebuttal:

Behold, an apple! See this little bore?  
My knife. We'll find a worm within the core,  
Seeking a life-force there with wriggling  
glee.  
(Why is that force "denied" to you and me?)

The worm's no fool to seek the poisoned  
seed,  
No voice impels, just pure and primal need,  
While wise men speak to us with cultured  
skill:  
Beware of apple seeds; they're known to  
kill.

Grave contradiction here — this gourmet worm!

Should not its eating mode make "wise men" squirm?

Several experts have suggested that HCN has its place in creation and health. HCN nay-sayers might consider that, while populations subsisting on HCN-rich diets may be at risk from too much of the same, scientists do have the responsibility not to nay-say but to present this matter aright on behalf of those populations that have a diet almost totally deficient in HCN. Those lives, too, are at risk — because of the deficiency.

Joan Krucina  
Lindley, N.Y.

If FDA sanctions the use of 200 ppm of hydrocyanic acid in lima beans, then by what warped logic does EPA order our sewers to be cleansed down to 0.65 ppm?

Hans F. Hanson  
Cerritos, Calif.

*Correction: "Enzyme filter thickens thinned blood" (SN: 9/8/84, p. 153) erroneously linked a form of neonatal jaundice to an obstruction of bile ducts "in the kidney." Such ducts convey bile from the liver, not the kidney.*

*Correction: In "Superconducting collider: A triple start" (SN: 9/22/84, p. 181), the project will require 1.5 million pounds of niobium-titanium alloy, not 11.5 million pounds. In addition, the SSC will collide protons against either protons or antiprotons.*



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