

FURTHER FABLED PHRASES

PETER NEWBY

Chesterfield, Derbyshire, England

Fable Four: Webster's First Addition

General Ulysses S. Grant was deeply concerned about the numbers of men deserting the regiments located in the more remote parts of the Wild West and, in consequence, he despatched one of his best staff officers to investigate the situation. Second Lieutenant Noah Webster was his choice of man for the job and, in due course, this keen young man arrived at Fort Haste, the outpost at the centre of this scandal. On receiving his sealed orders the outpost's commanding officer paraded his men so that Grant's representative could verify the numbers present. It was the casual remark of the colonel's wife, witnessing this scene, to her daughter, which has passed into immortality: "There is Noah, counting Fort Haste".

Fable Five: The Proverbial Queen

"Queen Anne is dead" is a well-known expression which signifies the end of an era. The era which this British monarch graced was one during which many of our best-loved proverbs arose, typical of which was the one recounted to her by the marquis known as The Queen's Great Subaltern, being the heir to the dukedom of Marlborough. The marquis told Her Majesty about a poor Siamese fellow who fell foul of a malevolent dwarf who gave the prisoner a choice of three angling tasks to perform if he wished to regain his freedom. The man made his choice, and, as the marquis said, "Thai man tied weights for gnome, Anne".

Fable Six: Overlord

During the Second World War the irascible General Montgomery often disagreed with his superior, Dwight D. Eisenhower. Monty objected to Eisenhower's pet project, diverting bomber raids from industrial targets to destroy the philistine Nazi architecture of Berlin which offended Ike's sensibilities. He also deplored Ike's name for the Normandy landings, "Operation Home Run", arguing for the cricket-oriented "Knock the Bastards for Six" instead. Roosevelt, called upon to arbitrate, countered with "Operation Concord", which not only suggested peace but recalled the first battle of the War of American Independence; Churchill favored something more Shakespearean, perhaps reflecting Caesar's genius. Both leaders agreed that such decisions were best left to the Commander-In-Chief. The result was the famous 1944 telegram to the President: Ike aim, eyesore. Aye, "Concord".