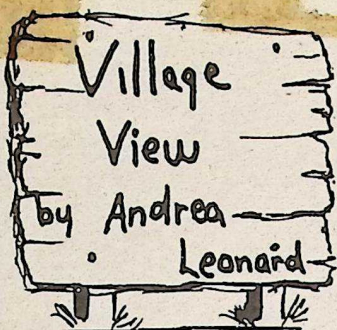




In typing an ordinary business letter the other day, I spelled Wednesday wrong.

Now, I've been spelling Wednesday correctly since second or third grade -- give or take, forty-odd years.

Not only did I spell it wrong -- after I recognized the error, I couldn't remember how to spell it properly. How strange are these minds of ours.

A simple thing like misspelling a word may seem a slim thread to hang by, but this column is one where thin threads and heavy hawsers are one and the same. The subject may be whimsical or serious, depending on the mood.

The problem I faced immediately was finding the correct spelling. Phonics did me no good; the calendar displayed only a W; the newspaper finally rescued me.

Ever since, I've been troubled and bothered by the incident. Today I began research.

The word comes from Middle English, Wodnes-day, and from Old English before that, "Woden's day". Further back still, from Latin, "day of Mercury".

Now we may be getting somewhere. Who was Woden?

Woden, we discover, was the chief Teutonic god, often identified with the Norse god Odin.

We're dipping now into Norse mythology; Odin was believed by the Norsemen to be the supreme deity, creator of the cosmos and man; the god of wisdom, war, art, culture and the dead.

The final reference is to wat, an Indo-European verb meaning to inspire and spiritually arouse. It's also a Germanic noun meaning insane or mad. The Latin word vates, closely connected, denotes prophet or poet.

Wednesday's quite a day, isn't it?

Curiosity's a characteristic normally associated with cats; maybe that's why many people enjoy the company of cats.. I do. And I've my own bump of curiosity too. So from here I go th the other days of the week.

Sunday. I can spell it with no trouble, but what does it mean? Simply, in Old English, it was sunnandaeg, "day of the sun", and a reference leads us to sawel, an Indo-European root word in a basic form; most of our modern western languages are derived from now-lost Indo-European tongues.

From sawel have come our present-day sounds for south and southern as well as all words containing the sound sol -- referring to the sun -- such as solarium, solar, parasol.

Monday is a romantic day. Old English, monan daeg, translates to "moon's day". Late Latin for moon is mona.

Tuesday is another day that refers to a person. In old English it was tiwesdaeg, "day of Tiu". Back we go into Germanic mythology to the god of war and the sky, identified with the Norse god Tyr. Tyr, it turns out, was the son of Odin, and now we all know who he was.

Looking up the reference to find the root derivative, I'm directed to deiw, meaning to shine, in the Indo-European language. In Latin we find deus, meaning god; and see how our word deity has come to us.

Other words connected with Tuesday, carried back through the development of sounds into language, are divine, Diana -- the moon goddess, dial, diet, dismal, meridian, adjourn, journal, journey and sojourn.

And in Greek mythology, we find Zeus, who was a god, of course, and the ruler of the heavens, and father of other gods and of mortal heroes as well.

The names of our days take on grand connections and implications, as we search into their background. What marvelous things will Thursday bring?

It's Thor's day! That's the Old English, influenced by Old Norse thorsdagr, and from an earlier word, thunresdaeg. Contractions were common, then as now, we see. Translated from Late Latin, we find Jovis dies or "Jupiter's day".

The Roman mythology, in case you've forgotten, Jupiter was the supreme god, patron of the Roman state, brother and husband of Juno, and was identified with the Greek god Zeus. He was also called "Jove".

Looking back to Thor, however, and thunresdaeg -- it's easy to see where we got our modern word "thunder".

Juno, incidentally, was the patroness of marriage and the wellbeing of woman. She is identified with the Greek goddess Hera.

Thursday's name, like that of Tuesday, has its roots in the Indo-European word deiw.

The sixth day of the week, the day we all look forward to, the day we honor with TGIF Clubs, comes to us from the Old English Frigedaeg. The root in Indo-European is pri, and means to love. In Germanic languages we find frijaz is beloved, belonging to the loved ones, not in bondage, free.

In Sanskrit, priya gives us dear, precious, and the word "sapphire"; and in Germanic frij- and is lover, friend. Old English leads us through friond, freond, to friend.

In Old Norse we meet Frigg, the goddess of love, wife of our old friend Odin. Translation to Latin gives Veneris dies, or "Venus's day", and progresses through the tongues to today's Friday.

Saturday -- can you guess? It comes from Saturn, the Roman deity identified with the Greek god Cronus. The reign of Saturn -- the golden age! In Old English, it was Saeterdaeg, short for Saeternesdaeg -- another contraction.

And there we have the days of the week.

We're missing only one part of this word-study. The part that all the day-names have in common. D-A-Y. We're sent, once more, to the Indo-European root-word agh -- considered as a "span of time". From Germanic tongues, dagaz, (with the initial d of obscure origin), the Old English adopted daeg; from this word, we have daisy and even dawn, as well as day.

See what happens to me when I misspell a common word like Wednesday? I've learned a lot and had fun doing it, too.

Never again will I forget how to spell Wednesday; I'll be thinking of Woden, Odin, Frigg and Saturn, and all the great gods of the Greeks and Norsemen.