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The Literate Monster

by WILLIAM CHAPMAN WHITE

IF SCIENCE KEEPS ON CONQUERING the unconquerable there just isn't going to be anything left for the human race to do. The news out of England, sent round the world by Reuters, shows to what ends science will reach.

Scientists at Manchester University, so the story says, have built an electronic computer into which a scattered collection of words can be fed. Deep down in the brain of the machine the words are put together and rearranged into complete sentences which are then poured out in legible form. The mere rumor of the existence of such a machine ought to strike terror into the hearts of the writers of radio and television serials, one-a-year novelists, and even columnists.

With the story of the machine's invention comes a sample of the machine's work. One of the inventors, obviously tongue-tied in the presence of his beloved, decided to feed into the machine a whole series of endearing words, in the hope that the machine would grunt and grumble and give out with a love letter. Sure enough, it did. Presumably that inventor sent it off at once to his girl.

Its text, verbatim, was: "Darling sweetheart, you are my avid fellow feeling. My affection curiously clings to your passionate wish. My liking yearns for your heart. You are my wistful sympathy, my tender liking. Yours beautifully."

If the girl fell for that and married the man she got what she deserved. Without the machine handy, the inventor is still tongue-tied. Breakfast conversation in that newly wed couple's home must be odd at times.

"I certainly don't understand you, Cecil," says the wife. "You used to write me such beautiful things before we were married and now you never say a word."

Cecil just stares, wordless and helpless.

"If you don't want to show me any avid fellow feeling any more," says the unhappy bride, "you might at least show me some wistful sympathy."

In the meantime Cecil and his friends, having solved the problem of writing love letters, are now busily working on a new machine that will carry on the rest of the courtship and let a man free for more important things, like inventing more such machines.