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Часть II

От автора

Как я и обещал читателям первого издания моей книги, предлагаю на их суд значительно расширенный и углубленный вариант.

На сей раз в книгу вошли многочисленные цитаты из тысяч статей, опубликованных в журнале *The Economist* за последнее десятилетие. Как правило, за одной цитатой стоит десяток публикаций, в разное время появившихся на страницах журнала, осмысление которых потребовало от меня поистине напряженных усилий. В свободное от семейных забот и работы время.

Предлагаемый запас слов по-прежнему напоминает «лингвистический детектив», как метко подметил один из моих читателей. Детективный сюжет стал, поверьте мне, еще более интригующим и захватывающим.

Тем же, кто предпочитает не спеша поразмышлять на досуге о смысле жизни, философии, религии, науке, человеческих отношениях, мироздании, любви и счастье, непременно придется по вкусу высококонцентрированная мудрость неутомимых авторов журнала *The Economist*.

Одним словом, хочу искренне верить, что чтение этого труда доставит читателям истинное удовольствие и поможет подняться на еще один, более высокий, уровень познания этого бесконечного мира. А я между тем обещаю работать не покладая рук над следующим изданием.

*До новых встреч,
Сергей Кузнецов*

Предисловие

Читал “Century”. Отметил, что выписать. Если бы делать выписки, составились бы те книги, которые нужны.

Л. Н. Толстой, 26 ноября, 1888 г.

Я думаю, что если бы мне прожить еще сорок лет и во все эти сорок лет читать, читать и читать и учиться писать талантливо, т.е. коротко, то через сорок лет я выпалил бы во всех вас из такой большой пушки, что задрожали бы небеса. Теперь же я такой лилипут, как и все.

А. П. Чехов, 3 августа 1899 г.

В нашей книге любознательный читатель узнает много новых забавных, удивительных и полезных фактов, среди которых будут, к примеру, ответы на следующие вопросы:

- Универсальный и эффективный рецепт, как дожить до 120 лет.
- Для чего бог любви Эрос всегда имел при себе наготове два вида наконечников для стрел?
- Комбинация из девяти самых ужасных слов в английском языке.
- Почему Достоевский хотел, чтобы американцы жили в России вдоль реки Амур?
- Как в Германии отапливают дома железнодорожными рельсами?
- Почему в звездную ночь навозные жуки быстрее уносят свою драгоценную добычу?
- Сколько сотен тонн золота можно хранить на крошечной кухне в «хрущобе»?
- Какое существо в живой природе до сих пор носит имя Гитлера?
- Как гарантированно избежать нежелательной беременности?
- Сколько миллионов лет тратит человечество в месяц на разговоры по телефону?
- Из чего любил готовить пироги Титус Андроникус?
- Как можно было успешно решить свои житейские проблемы в Голландии за горстку семян тюльпанов в XVII в.?

- Что оставил в качестве завещания человечеству в 90 баночках итальянский художник Пьеро Манзони?
- Сколько раз надо опустить под воду голову подозреваемого, чтобы тот окончательно и бесповоротно сознался в участии в террористических актах?
- Что советовал Наполеон делать с растущей мощью Китая?
- Как ракообразные повышали урожайность сельского хозяйства в средние века?
- Формула из четырех главных элементов распространения паники в любом государстве.
- Что надо ученому Крейгу Вентору, чтобы бросить вызов Богу и создать новое живое существо?
- Как проходят самые престижные похороны в Гане?
- Что Юлий Цезарь держал во рту во время заплывов на 300 метров?
- Сколько зиттабитов информации можно записать на одну молекулу ДНК?
- Какие микроорганизмы путешествовали в 135-метровом ковчеге Ноя?
- Когда Женева была разрушена мощным цунами?
- Три основных составляющих элементов американской мечты.
- Как Боб и Элис скрывают от Евы закодированные послания?
- Сколько верблюдов и кошек потеряли англичане в войне в Афганистане в 1842 г.?
- Какой вклад внес Наполеон в технологию консервирования продуктов?
- Была ли жена у Иисуса?

И многое-многое другое.

Загадочная русская душа и особенная статья России вынесены в отдельный раздел.

Фразеология первой части содержит много слов, которые объясняются во второй части:

- | | |
|----------------|------------------|
| • Actuary | • Opprobrium |
| • Blunted | • Ostentatiously |
| • Catechise | • Roadkill |
| • Hairy | • Scoff |
| • Fortuitously | • Sneer |
| • Gullibility | • Schmaltzy |
| • Hanky-panky | • Swaggering |
| • Hubris | • Timorous |
| • Minnow | • Unravelling |
| • Munching | • Untangling |

Сокращения

Русские

ант. – антоним
букв. – буквально
в. – век
вв. – века
г. – год
греч. – греческий (язык)
др. – другой, другие
др.-греч. – древнегреческий язык
им. – имени
каких-л. – каких-либо
какого-л. – какого-либо
какое-л. – какое-либо
какой-л. – какой-либо
каком-л. – каком-либо
кем-л. – кем-либо
кого-л. – кого-либо
кому-л. – кому-либо
н.э. – наша эра
напр. – например
обыкн. – обыкновенно
оскорбит. – оскорбительное
особ. – особенно
перен. – в переносном значении
ПО – программное обеспечение

преим. – преимущественно
проф. – профессор
син. – синоним
собир. – собирательное
сокр. – сокращение
тж. – также
чего-л. – чего-либо
чем-л. – чем-либо
чему-л. – чему-либо
что-л. – что-либо
чьей-л. – чьей-либо
чью-л. – чью-либо

Английские

ch. – chapter
dr. – doctor
esp. – especially
et al. – et alia
etc. – et cetera
Jap. – Japanese
sen. – senator
smb. – somebody
smth. – something
v. – versus

Часть I

“ Age, health, life, death, soul

Life is like a roll of toilet paper; the closer you get to the end of the roll, the faster it goes.

Until the 20th century the average human lived about as long as a chimpanzee.

Few things are more tragic than the death of a woman in pregnancy or childbirth. An American woman is more likely to be struck by lightning than to die in childbirth.

Each day 91 Americans die from an opioid overdose.

Who is not a patient?

Defining “conspicuous consumption” as “apparel, watches, jewelry, cars and other socially visible goods”, she finds that even though the poor must dedicate much of their income to basic necessities, they devote a higher share of their total spending to conspicuous consumption than the rich do. And the trend is gaining steam. Between 1996 and 2014 the richest 1% fell further behind the national average in the percentage of their spending dedicated to bling. The middle income quintile went the other way: by 2014 they spent 35% more than the average as a percentage of their annual expenditure.

Elephant corpses are centres of attraction for living elephants. They will visit them repeatedly, sniffing them with their trunks and rumbling

as they do so. This is a species-specific response; elephants show no interest in the dead of any other type of animal. And they also react to elephant bones, as well as bodies, as Dr Wittemyer has demonstrated. Prompted by the anecdotes of others, and his own observations that an elephant faced with such bones will often respond by scattering them, he laid out fields of bones in the bush. Wild elephants, he found, can distinguish their conspecifics' skeletal remains from those of other species. And they do, indeed, pick them up and fling them into the bush.

Coca-Cola distribution is so broad, its marketing so expert that the Gates Foundation has urged vaccine campaigns to mimic its strategy.

Across the planet, 1.8bn human beings drink water contaminated with faeces.

Death through overwork is considered to be such a feature of the workplace in Japan that there is a word for it: karoshi.

Humans have always sought to intoxicate themselves.

Looking after someone with dementia can wipe out even a prosperous family.

The promise of a longer life, well lived, would round a person out. But this vision of the future depends on one thing – that a long existence is also a healthy one. Humanity must avoid the trap fallen into by Tithonus, a mythical Trojan who was granted eternal life by the gods, but forgot to ask also for eternal youth. Eventually, he withered into a cicada.

In 2016 a coroner's office in Ohio had to store corpses in refrigerated lorries for a week because residents were overdosing on opioids faster than their bodies could be processed.

How young is too young? Rich democracies give different answers, depending on the context: in New Jersey you can buy alcohol at 21 and cigarettes at 19, join the army at 17, have sex at 16 and be tried in court as an adult at 14.

Nothing ages faster than yesterday's dreams of tomorrow.

People around the world produce an estimated 6.4 trillion litres of urine every year.

Kids not born in the '90s, also didn't have kids in the 2010s. It's the echo of the echo.

Those who live to be very old are never previously famous. Few in the world know them, and they know almost nothing of the world.

One poll in 2016 found that French people are the most pessimistic on Earth, with 81% grumbling that the world is getting worse and only 3% saying that it is getting better.

End-of-life businesses also offer alternatives to costly temple grave-stones, such as scattering loved ones' ashes in Tokyo Bay (just don't tell the honeymooners to whom the boat is also offered).

More than 80% of the candidate drugs that make it into clinical trials because they worked in mice do not go on to work well in humans.

Hospital doctors have far more opportunities to earn substantial kick-backs – try seeing a good specialist in China without offering a fat “red envelope”.

Every year 350 tonnes of cigarette butts, the equivalent in weight to two blue whales, are cleared off the streets of Paris alone.

The income-tax code is so knotty that America has as many tax preparers per 1,000 people as Indonesia has doctors.

Diseases compete to kill people as they age; if one does not get you the next will.

Gay men's rate of anal cancer is the same as the rate of cervical cancer for women.

Julius Caesar (at the time in his 50s) swam nearly 300 metres or six lengths of an Olympic pool with his sword and purple cloak clenched between his teeth, apparently holding his official papers dry above his head.

If you had to be reborn anywhere in the world as a person with average talents and income, you would want to be a Viking.

Life's candle burns most brightly when it is about to go out.

90% of the brain develops between the ages of zero to five, yet we spend 90% of our dollars on kids above the age of five.

It's a bit like being a doctor in a plague year; you'll be busy for a while, but it doesn't bode well for the long term.

John Graunt tallied causes such as "the King's Evil", a tubercular disease believed to be cured by the monarch's touch.

Many albinos are murdered by people who think that their bones contain gold or have magical powers. Some witchdoctors claim that amulets made from albino bones can cure disease or bring great wealth to those who wear them. Women are at higher risk of rape because of a myth that sex with an albino can cure HIV. A gruesome trade in their body parts has spurred killings in Tanzania, Burundi, Mozambique, Zambia and South Africa.

Greater Manchester's 2.7m people make good guinea pigs for the experiment in combining health and social care – life expectancy is below average, unemployment above it.

Drones can transport blood, but they can't transport doctors, who need roads.

"When good Americans die, they go to Paris," observed Thomas Gold Appleton.

One high-class restaurant in Beijing specialises in animal penises, the eating of which is supposed to boost virility. Westerners visit for a titter, Chinese businessmen to impress their clients. (Yak penis, says the eatery's website, is a "luxury gift for close friends".) A book of "traditional, health-preserving" recipes on sale in one of Beijing's biggest state-run bookshops includes the following remedy for impotence and premature ejaculation: "18 grams of caterpillar fungus; one fresh human placenta. Wash the caterpillar fungus and the placenta separately. Place in a saucepan, with water. Stew at high temperature until the placenta is cooked. (Drink the human placenta soup once a week for one or two weeks to see results.)"

Jeanne Calment, who lived for 122 years and 164 days (longer than any other person), said the secret to her longevity was a diet rich in olive oil, port wine and chocolate. She smoked until the age of 117. Alexander Imich, who was the oldest living man (111) until he died in June, did not

have a secret. Asked how he lived so long, he replied, “I don’t know, I simply didn’t die earlier.”

Predictions without dates are easy. All trees fall; it is spotting the diseased ones that is trick.

In 1847 Ignac Semmelweis pioneered mother-friendly childbirth, insisting that doctors should wash their hands between autopsies and delivery rooms.

Anti-corruption campaigners would have nothing to cheer if the cure ended up being more harmful than the disease.

Changing a face can change nothing, but facing a change can change everything.

People around the world produce an estimated 6.4 trillion litres of urine every year.

America’s hospitals are the most expensive part of the world’s most expensive health system. They accounted for \$851 billion, or 31%, of American health spending in 2011. If they were a country, they would be the world’s 16th-largest economy.

He learned about the “umbles”: as hypothermia sets in you mumble, fumble, grumble, stumble, then finally tumble. Without help you die.

Asked the secret of his youthfulness, Benito Martinez Abrogan, 120, said he had never cheated a man or said bad things of other people.

Patriotism requires Medicare for all. Somehow, neither has caught on.

Patriotism requires Medicare for all. Somehow, neither has caught on.

Puffing 15–24 cigarettes a day, on average, robs a smoker older than 35 of five hours of life each and every day. But 20 minutes of moderate exercise a day earns almost an hour back. Alcohol wears a Janus face: the first drink of the day adds about 30 minutes per day to one’s life expectancy, but each subsequent one cuts it back by 15 minutes.

The Amish in America spurn modern medicine, along with almost everything else invented since the 17th century.

The UN reckons that by 2100 the planet's population will be rising past 10.9 billion, and be much older. The median age will go up from 29 to 41, and around 28% will be over 60. A few may even remember this article.

ERC, a research firm, says consumption per person was 999 cigarettes a year in 1990 and only 882 in 2012. Yet the appetite for cigarettes continues to rise. Smokers lit up 5.9 trillion times last year compared with 5.1 trillion in 1990. ERC tracks 123 countries, home to about 99% of smokers. It finds the worst addicts in central and eastern Europe. Serbians each smoke a lung-blackening 3,323 cigarettes per year, more than any other nationality. Eight of the top ten countries, ranked by consumption per person, are in the former Eastern block.

The more sophisticated the patient, the less scalpel-happy the doctors. The best informed patients of all are, of course, other doctors. Sure enough, physicians went under the knife much less often than the average Ticino resident. Lawyers' wives – whom doctors have good reason to fear – had the fewest hysterectomies of all.

Walgreens is another operator of worksite clinics. One of its 358 centres is in Orlando, at the Disney theme park. It aims to treat Disney's "cast members" quickly (unblocking their huge ears and fixing their fairy wings, presumably), so they can go back to work.

Doctors manage to restart only about half of the hearts that stop in a hospital, and only about a sixth of patients will go on to survive long enough to be discharged. One of the toughest decisions faced by hospital staff is how long to keep trying, and when to give up on a particular patient as a lost cause.

The lexicon of oncology is filled with military metaphors: the war on cancer, aggressive tumours, magic bullets. And although these are indeed only metaphors, they do reflect an underlying attitude – that it is the clinician's job to attack and destroy his patient's tumour directly, with whatever weapons are to hand. As in real warfare, those weapons may be conventional (surgery), chemical (cancer-killing drugs) or nuclear (radiation therapy). There is even talk of biological agents, in the form of viruses specifically tailored to seek out and eliminate their tumorous targets. Which is all well and good as strategies go. But as Sun Tzu observed, the wisest general is not one who wins one hundred victories in one hundred battles, but rather one who overcomes the ar-

mies of his enemies without having to fight them himself. And one way to do that is to get someone else to do your fighting for you.

Is dumping faeces in rivers UN policy?

What is depression? The ancient Greeks believed it resulted from an imbalance in the body's four humours: blood, phlegm, yellow bile and black bile (from the Greek word *melas* or "dark" and *kholé*, meaning "bile"), with too much of the latter resulting in a melancholic state of mind. Early Christianity blamed the devil and God's anger for man's suffering, with depression the result of the struggle against worldly temptations and sins of the flesh. In the Renaissance it was viewed as a disease of scholars, such as Robert Burton, author of "The Anatomy of Melancholy", who were given to abstract and intense speculation.

The very notion of imposing a levy on calorific foods is very illiberal. What is the rationale? People who have sex without a condom also impose a burden on health services if they subsequently catch AIDS or other sexually transmitted diseases. Should the condomless also be taxed?

Not quite old enough for Medicare (which typically kicks in at 65) and not quite poor enough for Medicaid.

In 2001 the Singapore-based WTO – that is, the World Toilet Organisation – chose a day to mark the plight of the world's loo-less 2.5 billion (its slogan this year was "I give a shit, do you?"). At least 19 countries mark it. But not the UN, which is perhaps "scared of using the word 'toilet'," a WTO spokesman muses.

In most countries it is illegal to buy or sell a kidney. If you need a transplant you join a waiting list until a matching organ becomes available. This drives economists nuts. Why not allow willing donors to sell spare kidneys and let patients (or the government, acting on their behalf) bid for them? The waiting list would disappear overnight. If John and Mary love each other but are married to other people, they will be tempted to leave their current partner and marry each other. But if John loves Mary, while Mary loves her husband more than John, both will stay put.

The birth and death phases of stars are associated with heavy dust clouds that give off an infra-red signal which might resemble the swarm of artificial satellites constituting a Dyson sphere.

In China a strong taboo hangs over discussing death.

Only 8% of South Africans opt for cremation, compared with a third in America, half in China, three-quarters in Britain and 95% in Japan. To many South Africans, cremation is taboo, not least because of ancestor-worship and a propensity to commune with the dead. Many prefer a burial in the countryside where they were born.

Patrolling a rough neighbourhood is a health hazard.

Breast cancer is rare in men. And prostate cancer is obviously absent from women.

The Puente Hills landfill, an artificial mountain near Los Angeles is the biggest dump in America, 30 years old, 150 metres high and containing 130m tonnes of rubbish within a 700-acre footprint. If it were a building, it would be among the 20 tallest in the city. Building a rubbish pile is, it turns out, surprisingly high-tech.

If only we had been born clowns, nothing bad would happen to us except a few bruises and a smear of whitewash.

Fiat came round after a near-death experience.

As anyone who has been to Japan knows, there are strict rules about bathing in **onsen**, or hot springs. Bodies must be scrubbed beforehand, swimming trunks are banned and tattoos are taboo.

Sun, sea and alcohol, for at least two weeks a year, is now one of the unwritten rights of the British people.

A rising tide lifts all boats, but not all spirits.

One has always choose between cholera and plague in Kinshasa.

To celebrate falling fertility is like congratulating the captain of the Titanic on heading towards the iceberg more slowly.

One suggested that driving damages the ovaries.

Mr Richards laid down the riffs and Mr Jagger provided the vocal pyrotechnics. But time took its toll. Mr Richards's decision to give up heroin destroyed the delicate division of labour in which Mr Jagger took care of the

details while Mr Richards took the drugs. Mr Jagger started to refer to the Stones as “his” band. He even performed the group’s songs on solo tour.

To live in Havana was to live in a factory that turned out human beauty on a conveyor-belt. He didn’t want beauty.

GM spends more on health than it does on steel.

Many women still have no choice but to use dried leaves as sanitary towels: a Korean-American missionary says the greatest gift you can give to a North Korean woman is a washable one made of fabric. “They cry with joy.”

Over half the world’s female suicides are Chinese.

He has a brain-bank of 200 experts.

Humans have an uncontrollable urge to be precise, for better or (all too often) worse. That is a fine quality in a watch-repair man or a brain surgeon, but counter-productive when dealing with uncertainty.

Most British towns have a Victorian pool or two, thanks to the 1846 Public Baths and Wash Houses Act, which gave local authorities the power to raise funds to keep the working classes clean and healthy. Since then demand has ebbed: the poor have their own facilities these days and the rich slope off to private clubs.

As every actuary knows, the best way to live for a long time is to pick up your parents carefully.

“ Art, books, music, Hollywood, education, media

Who could paint an apple after Cézanne?

Viewers would decide in seven seconds whether or not to watch.

Michelangelo Merisi was omnisexual and died of sunstroke and syphilis, aggravated by lead poisoning from the paints he mixed.

Before the first world war the most exciting artists were French; in the 1990s they were Chinese. Now the hot new place for contemporary art is Africa.

All you need for a movie is a girl, a gun, lots of singing, melodrama and never-ending dance sequences. Or so a big chunk of the Indian audience believes. Pre-screening rituals include burning camphor inside a sliced pumpkin before smashing it near the big screen to bring good luck.

Vincent Van Gogh died in obscurity, having sold only one painting.

BP will hope that having a new partner will work out better than it did for Anna Karenina, who flung herself in front of a train after the disintegration of her relationship with her replacement Russian lover.

Pablo Picasso: "Good artists copy, great artists steal."

No one has ever bothered to explain what "good" or "bad" jazz really is. When you see a live performance, you may be watching a 60-year-old musician playing a 100-year-old piece.

Of Nabokov's 19 fictions, no fewer than six wholly or partly concern themselves with the sexuality of prepubescent girls.

The painter was also a shrewd businessman; he mixed indigo and madder to replicate the effect of the period's most expensive pigment, Tyrian purple, which was extracted from sea snails and worth more than its weight in gold.

CNN's challenge is to attract more viewers when no one is shooting anyone or blowing anything up.

Back when newspapers were king, Charles Brownson, an American congressman, used to say that one should never quarrel with anyone who buys ink by the barrel.

Artists came to paint and sculpt, writers to write, deadbeats to die, and a large share to drink and misbehave.

Only twice did George Martin, the Beatles record producer impose himself: at the start, insisting that they replace Pete Best as their drummer, and at the end, when he agreed to record "Abbey Road" if they stopped fighting.

Socrates's bugbear was the spread of the biggest-ever innovation in communications – writing. He feared that relying on written texts, rather than the oral tradition, would “create forgetfulness in the learners' souls... they will trust to the external written characters and not remember of themselves.” Enos Hitchcock voiced a widespread concern about the latest publishing fad in 1790. “The free access which many young people have to romances, novels and plays has poisoned the mind and corrupted the morals of many a promising youth.” (There was a related worry that sofas, introduced at the same time, encouraged young people to drift off into fantasy worlds.) Cinema was denounced as “an evil pure and simple” in 1910; comic books were said to lead children into delinquency in 1954; rock'n'roll was accused of turning the young into “devil worshippers” in 1956; Hillary Clinton attacked video games for “stealing the innocence of our children” in 2005.

James Bond films are almost always the same: Bond is sent to an exotic location, meets and seduces a woman, gets caught by the villain, escapes, kills the villain and gets the girl.

Java sparrows are able to distinguish cubist paintings from impressionist and Japanese ones, and that pigeons can tell a Chagall from a Van Gogh, as well as discriminating between the Japanese school and the impressionist.

To build his factory, Mr Fazioli moved from Rome to Sacile, near Venice and, more important, near the Val di Fiemme, known as the “musical forest” for spruce trees yielding especially resonant wood.

This book is a gem, and there are still 91 shopping days till Christmas.

“Terminator: Genisys”, a flop in America with \$90m in takings on a \$155m production budget, was a blockbuster overseas, earning \$351m, including \$113m in China. Even if big names like these have lost some of their lustre at home, abroad they can be “sort of like supernovas”, the studio executive says. “They have flamed out a long time ago but the light shines on past their death.”

Unable to reach any conclusion about what art is, he turns instead to what it is not. There are plenty of things that are not works of art: for example, human excrement. Probably. But what

about Piero Manzoni, an Italian artist who died in 1963 after creating an “edition” of 90 tin cans each containing 30 grams of his own excrement? The Museum of Modern Art, the Tate Gallery and the Pompidou Centre snapped them up. More fool them, you say. Others would agree, but they would be no closer to defining what art is.

Albert Einstein, a huge fan of Bach’s, advised others to “listen, play, love, revere – and keep your mouth shut.”

Do orchestral conductors do anything useful?

Alfred Hitchcock, who knew about such things, explained the difference between shock and suspense. Shock is when a bomb suddenly explodes. Suspense is when viewers see a bomb beneath a table where people are peacefully chatting. Shock is seeing the tops of telephone poles and trees poking above roiling waters on one side of the two-lane causeway between Morganza and Batchelor in Louisiana – particularly when the Mississippi River is on the other side of the road. Suspense is imagining where that water will be in a few days.

Salinger spent ten years writing “The Catcher in the Rye” and “the rest of his life regretting it,” observe David Shields and Shane Salerno in a new biography and related documentary.

Art is not a mirror to hold up to society, but a hammer with which to shape it,” declared Bertolt Brecht.

Herodotus describes flying snakes, fox-sized ants that unearthed gold dust, men with the heads of dogs and others with no heads at all whose eyes are set in their chests. But, as with reports of the intervention of the gods, he often distances himself by remarking that he is not sure if he can believe what he has been told.

What price the Louvre, the Parthenon or Yellowstone National Park?

Imagine a place run by film stars – vain, power-hungry, paranoid, adored. Imagine they had been in charge not for the duration of a reality television series but for decades in a territory containing 72m people and one of the world’s largest cities. It would be a disaster zone, wouldn’t it?

Does Cannes need to shock?

Horace Walpole always regretted the export to Russia of the legendary British art collection, fearing that it would be “burnt in a wooden palace on the first insurrection”. But by a twist of fate, the sale saved the paintings. In 1789, ten years after they left, the Picture Gallery at Houghton was destroyed by fire.

“It is possible to teach every branch of human knowledge with the motion picture,” observed Thomas Edison in 1913, predicting that books would soon be obsolete in the classroom.

There is now nothing you can imagine that cannot be shown by Hollywood.

To judge a painter, you have to wait at least two centuries.

Such schmaltzy songs as “White Christmas”, “Rudolph the Red Nosed Reindeer” and “Let it Snow” were all by Jewish musicians.

The Library of Alexandria – built during the 3rd century BC to house the accumulated knowledge of centuries – reputedly had a copy (often the only copy) of every book in the world at the time. It burned to the ground sometime between Julius Caesar’s conquest of Egypt in 48BC and the Muslim invasion in 640AD. Some historians believe the loss of the Alexandrian library, along with the dissolution of its huge community of scribes and scholars, created the conditions for the Dark Ages that descended across Europe as the Roman empire crumbled from within. A millennium of misery ensued, with ignorance and poverty the rule until the Renaissance dawned.

Paul Newman’s blue eyes: cornflower blue, steel blue or ice blue?

“What is America but beauty queens, millionaires, stupid records and Hollywood?” asked Adolf Hitler in 1940.

“Avatar”, an enjoyable nonsense art.

No one in Hollywood cared what Emmanuelle wore, as long as she removed it. Her long, willowy body was rented out, to become the fantasy possession of thousands of devoted men. But her price was too high, and they would never have her.

Americans would sooner unplug their refrigerators than their cable boxes.

If Greece represented the first day in art, then these carved tusks and sculpted stones mark the dazzling light of its “early morning”.

Last September the Boston Museum of Fine Arts bowed to public pressure and returned the top half of an 1,800-year-old statue called “Weary Herakles”, which came from southern Turkey. Left to the museum by an American couple, its documented provenance went back no more than 30 years, which suggests it was looted, probably in the late 1970s. Mr Erdogan himself brought this trophy back to Turkey, reuniting the head and torso with the statue’s bottom half.

A classical scholar at Winchester College and at Oxford, Frank Thompson was proficient in nine languages and a voracious reader. (He read “War and Peace” many times, once in Italian.)

“I believe in equality for everyone, except reporters and photographers,” Mahatma Gandhi once said.

Britain exports around 3% of the world’s goods and 6% of the world’s services, but the country’s artists account for around 13% of global music sales.

A sense of comedy is never far off. “Mount Sepsick! Mount Spittelboom!” cries the wicked brother in another story, groping for the magic words that will open the cave. “Mount Siccapillydiricus!” he tries again in desperation.

Some may have been sudoku, tredoku or futoshiki freaks, who buy daily newspapers, extract the puzzle pages and throw away the rest.

Forgers nowadays typically favour 20th-century abstract and expressionist styles. Mimicking Jackson Pollock’s drip-and-splatter paintings is easier than faking old masters such as Rembrandt. Swamped with lawsuits, the Pollock-Krasner Foundation stopped authenticating works in 1996, four decades after Pollock’s death. Lawsuits continued anyway. A court even entertained a suit from a man with a painting signed “Pollack”.

A publicist who specializes in selling sauce to the tabloids.

Dante’s complicated ABA, BCB, CDC, DED.

Music is a mystery. It is unique to the human race: no other species produces elaborate sound for no particular reason.

Miss Lena Horne's producers once complained that she opened her mouth too wide to sing. They meant it was a Negro thing.

If you want to get a message down into the soul of a God-fearing, native-to-the-earth, rural-thinking person, one of the surest ways is through traditional country music – anyone who wants to understand the world's most politically influential tribe – the people of Middle America, who pick most American presidents – should pay attention to country music. Country music has always been the best shrink that 15 bucks can buy.

You're not going to sit down and watch the BBC world news in 3-D.

A Hollywood executive is powerful and successful largely because he is viewed as being powerful and successful... A group of terrorists is planning to kill millions of Americans. Only one man can stop them: Jack Bauer. Unfortunately, he has been imprisoned in a secret facility. And tortured. Then decapitated and fed to boars. In a typical day, Agent Bauer is shot and stabbed more often than he takes bathroom breaks, but it never seems to slow him down. That was a spoof of "24" by Dave Barry, a comic writer. All this is harmless fantasy, of course. Or is it? A disconcerting number of Americans take "24" seriously.

Introducing Huck Finn, Mark Twain gave warning: "Persons attempting to find a motive in this narrative will be prosecuted; persons attempting to find a moral in it will be banished; persons attempting to find a plot in it will be shot."

Michelangelo is a sculptor, a painter and an architect, he sees everything in three dimensions. It is as though he has put the human body on a spindle and is turning it back to front in one view.

More seasoned PR flacks might have done it differently. First, lynch the journalists concerned, ostensibly to discuss some other story. Then, over dessert, casually slip into the conversation the poison that their secret client wanted them to spread. With luck the reporters would follow up on the scuttlebutt without mentioning its source, assuring themselves that they had got the story through their "contacts".

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