

## **THE ELCOCK FAMILY**



**ERNEST EDWIN ELCOCK IN LATER LIFE  
HE WAS THE HEADMASTER AT BOTH NEWBOLD C of E  
AND GRIFFYDAM SENIOR SCHOOLS**

**BY SAMUEL T STEWART - FEBRUARY 2023**

## **PREFACE**

Ernest Elcock and his wife Miriam were both school teachers before moving from Upper Penn, Staffordshire to the local area between 1911 and 1921. Ernest made a significant contribution to local education both at the Newbold C of E School for several years and at Griffydam, where he was headmaster of the senior school there for 22 years.

Their son William Dennis attended Ashby de la Zouch Boys Grammar School before going to Manchester University and achieving a BA honours in French. He achieved academic notoriety through his book 'The Romance Languages'.



**ERNEST EDWIN ELCOCK AGED 44**

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When Ernest Edwin Elcock was born on January 7th 1884, in Alveley, Shropshire, his father, William Elcock, was 24 and his mother, Louisa Elizabeth Passey, was 25. By 1911 he had married Miriam Evelyn Thorpe who was born in Wolverhampton on February 28th 1885. They were living in Upper Penn, Staffordshire when Ernest is recorded as being an assistant schoolmaster. They had a son William Dennis Elcock aged 4mths at the time the 1911 census was taken.

1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.	7.	8.	9.	10.	11.
having been enumerated elsewhere. No one else must be included. (For order of entering names see Examples on back of Schedule.)	"Boarder," or "Servant."	Ages of Males.	Ages of Females.	aged 15 years and upwards.	less listed. If less than one year write "under one."	Total Children Born Alive.	Children still Living.	Children who have Died.	made or Material worked or dealt in should be clearly indicated. (See Instructions 1 to 8 and Examples on back of Schedule.)	No entry wants a If emples (Govern state w (See Ins ples o
1 Ernest Edwin Elcock	Head	24	-	Married	2				Schoolmaster (Assistant)	Shrop
2 Miriam Evelyn Elcock	Wife	-	26	Married	2	1	1	0	-	
3 William Dennis Elcock	Son	4 mths	-	-	-				-	
4										
5										

When the 1921 census was taken, they also had two daughters, both also born in 'Upper Penn', Staffordshire : Evelyn May was born in 1913 and Olive May in 1915.

The 1921 census records that they had moved to the local area, where Ernest Elcock had taken the post of headmaster at 'Worthington (Newbold) Church of England School', Miriam had also entered the teaching profession as she is recorded as an assistant teacher there.

NAME and SURNAME	RELATIONSHIP to Head of Household	AGE	SEX	MARRIAGE or ORPHANHOOD	BIRTHPLACE and NATIONALITY	OCCUPATION and EMPLOYMENT		
						Personal Occupation	Employment	Place of Work
1 Ernest Edwin Elcock	Head	37 5	M	Married	Shropshire - Alveley	Schoolmaster (Head, Elementary School)	Leicestershire County Council Education Committee	Worthington C of E School SP13 1H
2 Miriam Evelyn Elcock	Wife	36 3	F	Married	Staffordshire - Wolverhampton	School Teacher (Assistant, Elem. School)	Leicestershire County Council Education Committee	Worthington C of E School SP13 1H
3 William Dennis Elcock	Son	10 6	M	Both alive	Staffordshire - Upper Penn			
4 Evelyn May Elcock	Daughter	7 3	F	Both alive	Staffordshire - Upper Penn			
5 Olive May Elcock	Daughter	5 7	F	Both alive	Staffordshire - Upper Penn			

This would have been Newbold C of E School (Worthington indicating the parish) as Worthington village did not have its own school till 1926. All the three children were in full time education, presumably at Newbold C of E School.

William or Dennis as he was known, was 10yrs 6m old in 1921 and he was shortly to move to Ashby Boys Grammar School, to continue his education, but more about that later. Newbold school is given as being of Elementary Standard at the time. In November 1919, it was recorded in the Leicester Journal that 56 children were walking from the village of Worthington to Newbold for their education.

Ernest Elcock would have moved to take the position of Headmaster at Newbold school sometime between the 1911 and 1921 censuses. He left in 1926 to become the Headmaster at Griffydam Senior School.

There was no central heating in Newbold C of E School in those days, and open fires would have welcomed the children on winter mornings. In the big schoolroom, a huge cast iron fire grate would have kept the children warm. Paraffin lamps swung from the ceiling and although these were not often used in school times, they were always glowing every other Sunday when a Church Service was held there instead of the locals having to walk all the way down to Worthington church.



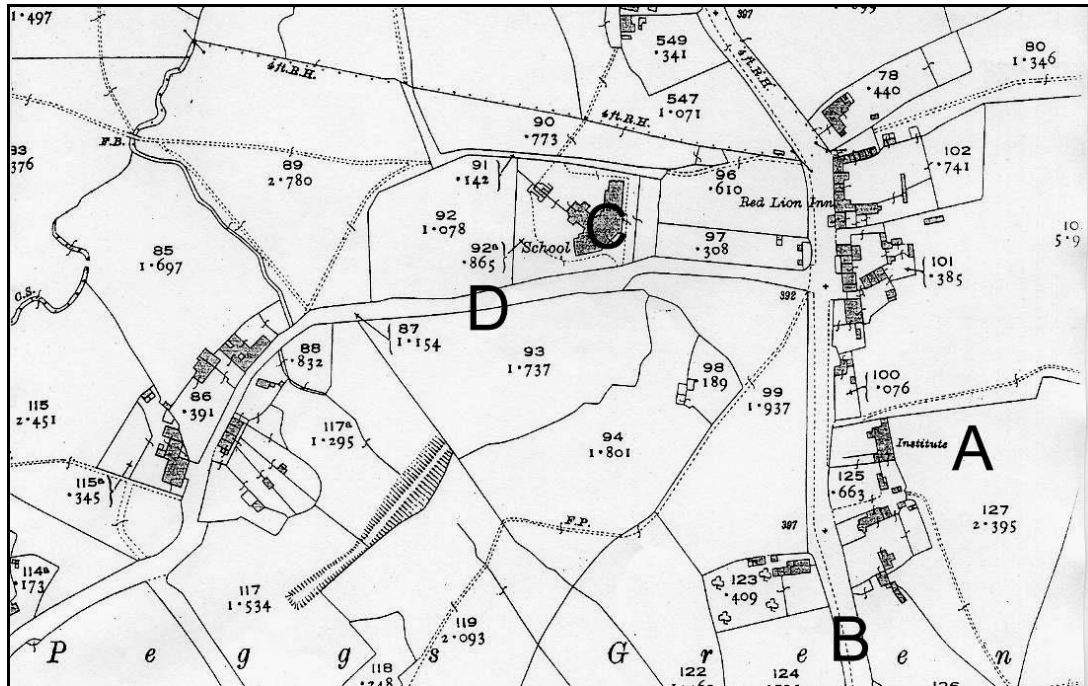
The three people in the above early 1900s photograph of Newbold C of E school are the school headmaster at the time, Reuben Sisson, with his wife Clara and Hilda Daisy Statham, an assistant teacher. Hilda Daisy Statham was born at Worthington in 1892 to James Statham (a boot and shoe maker) Her sister Elizabeth Statham, was recorded in the 1921 census as being a teacher at Griffydam school.

Reuben Sissons had been the schoolmaster for 25 years, and was organist and choirmaster at Worthington church for 18 years. It is assumed that Ernest Elcock would have followed Reuben Sisson as the headmaster and the family would have lived in the schoolmaster's house which is the building on the left.

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## EDWIN ELCOCK BECOMES HEADMASTER AT GRIFFYDAM SENIOR SCHOOL

The new Griffydam Senior School, shown on the following map marked **C**, was built adjacent to what is now School Lane Hill, Peggs Green c.1915. It was converted into a private residence a few years ago.



### Extract from 1923 O/S map

- A** - The former "Griffydam Wesleyan Methodist Day School" built 1853 which was subsequently used as an adult education institute
- B** - Now Nottingham Road
- C** - Griffydam School built c.1915.
- D** - School Lane



**Griffydam Senior School viewed from Nottingham Road**

Ernest Elcock became headmaster in 1926 and the school log book records that he retired after 22 years service on September 30th 1948. Children from Griffydam, Newbold, Coleorton, Peggs Green, Swannington, Thringstone and Osgathorpe attended the school. Pupils could transfer to the grammar school in Coalville at 11 years of age if they passed the 11+ examination. Others stayed there until they reached 14 years of age

During the second world war evacuees from Birmingham and London came to the school. In 1939, there were 221 pupils. The school did not have running water supplied until 1939. Prior to that, drinking water was obtained from 'Griffy Well', which was a short walk from the school.

After 1948, pupils aged 11 and over were transferred to secondary schools in Coalville and the school became an Infant and Junior School. Pupils from the Infant School on the Top Road, Griffydam which was built in 1936 were transferred to the former Senior School where Miss K. Wright became the headmistress.

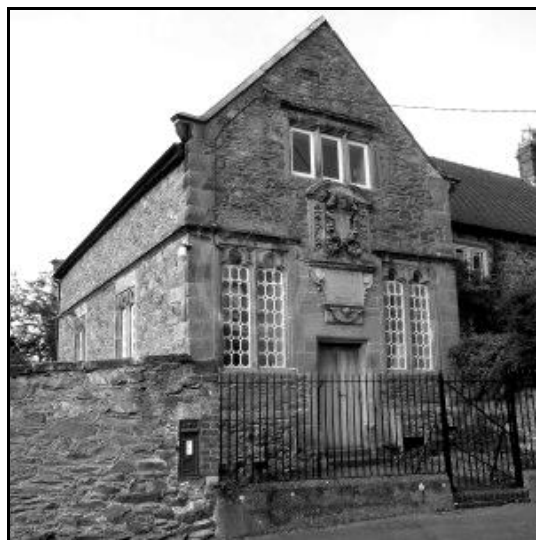
In 1954, the existing 59 pupils moved back to the former infant school on the Top Road, Griffydam and the school on School Lane continued as an annex to Coalville Grammar School until 1962. Pupils were transported to the school in buses.

Margaret Barkby, born and bred in Coleorton, started attending the new school c.1923/4 and recalled that the headmaster was known as 'Daddy' Elcock. Mr. Kirk was the woodwork master, and other teachers remembered were Mr. Danvers, Miss Florrie Johnson, Miss Starbuck and Miss Morley. Margaret went on to Broomleys' School at Coalville and left to work in Leicester at the age of 14. The author has not been able to discover why Edwin Ernest Elcock was referred to as 'Daddy' but it has been confirmed by other pupils who attended the school.



**Griffydam Football Team 1928/29 season  
Mr. Ernest Elcock (headmaster) is on the RH side**

Whilst Ernest Elcock was at Griffydham Senior School, he and his wife Miriam plus children lived in the headmaster's house which adjoined the 'Harley Endowed Free Grammar School' at Osgathorpe for which he had somehow presumably managed to secure the lease for from the Thomas Harley Osgathorpe Charity.



**The former Osgathorpe Grammar school  
and the adjoining headmaster's house**

The 'Harley Free Endowed Grammar School' closed c.1906 basically due to a lack of pupils and the existence of an Elementary National School at Osgathorpe which persuaded the education authorities to build a new grammar school at Coalville known initially as Newbridge High School. Following his retirement, Ernest Elcock was vice chairman of the governors of that school for a number of years. The 'Harley Free Endowed Grammar School' was later re-opened as an infant school for a period.

Ernest and Miriam Elcock were still living at Harley House when Ernest died on the 20th December 1966, aged 82. He pre-deceased Miriam by 9 years who died on the 15th November 1976 age 91. It is assumed Miriam still resided at Harley House following her husband's death.

Ernest and Miriam Elcock played an active part in Osgathorpe village life. The Sunday before he died, Ernest played the organ at St. Mary's Church, Osgathorpe where he had been organist for many years. **Ernest was a member and former chairman of the local parish council** and in the educational sphere remained vice-chairman of the governors of Coalville Grammar School until his resignation a week prior to his death. Mrs Elcock was for many years president of Osgathorpe Women's Institute and it is assumed she continued to live at Harley House following her husband's death. Sadly, their son William Dennis pre-deceased his parents, but more about William Dennis later.



**Ernest and Miriam Elcock's grave in  
Osgathorpe's new cemetery off Breedon road**

**Leicester Mercury - Weds Dec 21st 1966**

### **Ex - Griffydham Headmaster Dies Aged 82**

The death has occurred at his home Harley House Osgathorpe of Mr Ernest Edwin Elcock former headmaster of Griffydham School near Coalville Mr Elcock 82 took an active part in village life. Last Sunday he played the organ at the village church at Osgathorpe where he had been organist for many years Mr Elcock came to Leicestershire from Shropshire almost half century ago to become the head of Griffydham School and retired about 15 (?) years ago after 30 (?) years there. He was a member and former chairman of the local parish council and in the educational sphere remained vice-chairman of the governors of Coalville Grammar School until his resignation just over a week ago. He leaves a wife Mrs Elcock who was for many years president of Osgathorpe Women's Institute and two daughters.

**Leicester Mercury - Saturday February 25th 1967.**

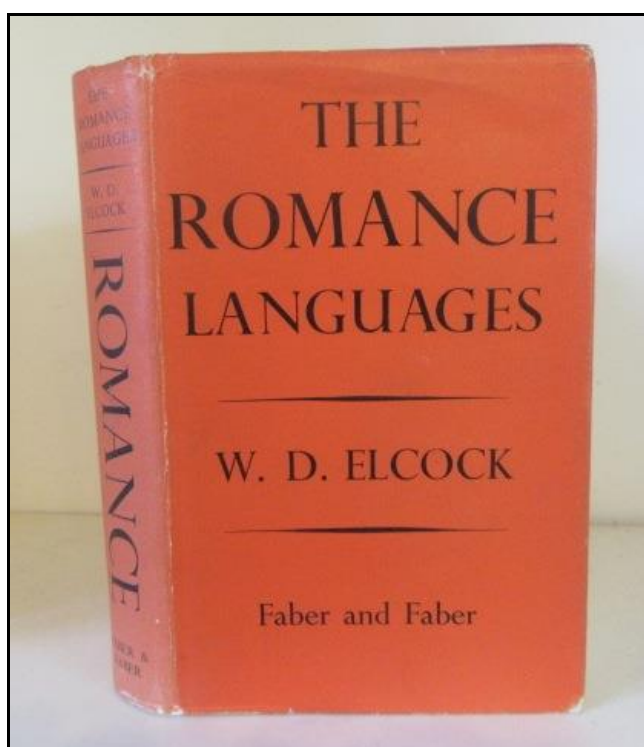
Mr Ernest Edwin Elcock Harley House Osgathorpe who died December 20 last year left £4,073 7s. gross, £3,996 net.



## PROFESSOR WILLIAM DENNIS ELCOCK 1910 to 1960

Professor William Dennis Elcock (known as Dennis) was the only son of Ernest and Miriam Elcock. He was born in 'Upper Penn', Staffordshire in 1910.

Little information is available on Dennis, but he was an academic who achieved some notoriety through a book he wrote entitled 'The Romance Languages' which was first published in 1960, the year of his death.



The family had moved to Newbold by 1921 when William Dennis was 10yrs 6m of age. Shortly afterwards, he went to Ashby Boy's Grammar School where it is recorded in the Nottingham Evening Post - 11 Aug 1927 that he had passed the 'University of London' intermediate examination in Arts at the age of 17. In the 'Birmingham Daily Gazette' - 18th Aug 1928 it is recorded that he had passed the 'High school Certificate in Arts' at age 18.

He qualified to go to the University of Manchester from where he graduated in 1932 with a BA. 1st class honours in French. His undergraduate career at *Manchester* was apparently one of exceptional distinction.

He was professor of Romance Philology and Medieval French Literature at London University from 1947 and Head of the Department of French at Westfield College. He sadly died at the early age of 49 on October 7th at his London home.

**Leicester Evening Mail - Tuesday 11 October 1960**

The death has occurred at his home in London of Mr. William Dennis Elcock, son of Mr. and Mrs. E. Elcock, of Harley House, Osgathorpe. Mr. Elcock, who was married, leaves a widow, but no family. He was Professor of Romance Philology and Medieval French Literature in the University of London from 1947, and he had been head of the French Department at Westfield College.



**Professor William Dennis Elcock**

## OBITUARY

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#### WILLIAM DENNIS ELCOCK, 1910-1960

William Dennis Elcock, Professor of Romance Philology and Medieval French Literature in the University of London and Head of the Department of French at Westfield College, died at his London home on October 7th, aged 49. The news of his tragically untimely death came as a great shock to all who knew him: not only were we totally unprepared to receive it, but also his name was very much in our minds since the publication, just over three months ago, of his last work, *The Romance Languages*. Dennis Elcock died as the book was beginning to receive the praises it justly deserves and thus to reward him for the ten years it cost him to write.

His death is indeed a grievous loss to Romance linguistics in this country. The quality of his teaching was exceptionally high, but a deep sense of modesty and great honesty often concealed the fullness of its worth. His great achievement in this field was to effect a broadening of the discipline in his University: he found it precariously balanced upon a traditionally quasi-exclusive northern French basis; now, it rests solidly upon the comparative study of the major Romance languages. In the words of Professor A. A. Parker, he 'stood out as a linguist who really was a Romance philologist in the fullest sense. . . . He had made his chair at Westfield College the centre of the sort of academic activity that is now rare—interdepartmental and intercollegiate teaching and research.'

The same qualities that informed his teaching are to be found underlying his research. His chosen field was that of dialectology, Pyrenean dialectology. Most of his creative work centred on the accurate description of Pyrenean linguistic phenomena and the balanced sifting of the evidence for a solution to some of the numerous problems posed by this classic area of Romance dialectology. His sceptical nature—he was a North-countryman through and through—often made him eschew and reject radical solutions; this may be seen in his conclusions regarding problems of substratum (the main theme of his doctoral dissertation, the now classic *De quelques affinités phonétiques entre l'aragonais et le béarnais*) and also in his attitude to modern structural theory when applied to Romance linguistics. Above all, he was always careful never to pronounce upon matters on which he did not know all there was to be known. Joseph Anglade's dictum, 'Le pire est . . . de vouloir traiter, à propos d'une étude de détail, les points les plus abstrus de la philologie romane', appears at the head of his first book, and its spirit imbues the whole of his work.

J. CREMONA

## BOOK REVIEWS

*The Romance Languages*. By W. D. Elcock. New York: Macmillan, 1960. Pp. 576. Elcock's *The Romance Languages* is one of the latest contributions which have appeared in the Oxford University Press series of *The Great Languages*—a series which has already contributed to Romance scholarship such well known works as *The French Language* by A. Ewert and *The Spanish Language* by W. J. Entwistle. The author's avowed purpose was not only to write the first general comparative treatment of the Romance languages in English, but also to produce a work that would be more readable, more tied in with general history and the humanistic disciplines than the French or German works of, let us say, Bourciez or Meyer-Lübke.

The author of any comparative Romance work—but especially of a work that wants to go beyond the mere statement of grammatical fact—faces a major organizational problem. Elcock has attempted to solve it by dividing his presentation into five major chapters: 1. The Latin Foundation, 2. Early Non-Latin Influences, 3. The Formative Period of Romance, 4. Medieval Latin and Romance Vernacular, 5. The Creation of Romance Standards. The chapters do not always contain what one would expect from their headings. This is especially true about Chapter 1, which contains not only the usual description of the features of "Vulgar Latin" but practically all of the "meat" of Comparative Romance phonology and morphology. Chapter 3, on the "formative period" is essentially concerned with the various superstratum influences (Germanic, Slavic, Arabic) to which Romance speech was exposed from roughly the fifth to the ninth century—influences which, in Prof. Elcock's view at least, are felt in the realm of vocabulary rather than phonology and morphology. The chapter on the creation of Romance standards focuses on the history of the Romance languages during the early middle ages. Later periods, the expansion in the New World, etc. are treated only very briefly and incidentally.

Professor Elcock's views on some of the major problems of Romance linguistics are, in fact, quite apparent from his organization: The characteristic features of the Romance languages developed quite early (before the fourth century) in Vulgar Latin. By Vulgar Latin, Professor Elcock means quite specifically Spoken Latin or Proto-Romance—and perhaps these are the names he should have used to avoid misunderstandings which might occur in spite of his explicit definitions of his usage of the term "Vulgar Latin" (cf. p. 20 and footnote, p. 311). Typical for Professor Elcock's early datings of Romance development are perhaps his acceptance of a form *niepos* on an inscription of 120 A.D. as proof of the Romance diphthongization, and his interpretation of the instances of voicing of unvoiced stops on the Pompeian inscriptions as occurrence of the later, specifically West Romance, voicing.

Professor Elcock's book is meant primarily as a textbook for graduate students. Under those circumstances he has, usually at least, tried to give an impartial and moderate point of view in the presentation of problematic and debatable questions. Unfortunately, in some cases at least, he has not suc-

*The Romance Languages.* By W. D. Elcock. Revised with a New Introduction by John N. Green. London: Faber and Faber, 1975. 589 pages.

The first edition (New York, 1960) of Elcock's book was reviewed in the pages of this journal by Emilio Alarcos Llorach (*HR*, 29 [1961], 347-50), a review that unfortunately escaped the reviser's attention. Alarcos praised a number of features of the text, but took Elcock to task for the disproportionate attention he gave to minor matters, for his general lack of knowledge of Spanish and his weird emphasis on Aragonese to the exclusion of Leonese. He, like other reviewers, also criticized Elcock's blatant neglect of any of the research done by structuralists that has done so much to illuminate the evolution of Romance. The reviser attempts to justify this neglect by claiming that Elcock had not read Chomsky at the time of the appearance of the first edition. The significance of this claim escapes this reviewer, especially in view of the very slight contribution of transformational-generative grammar to historical linguistics. Apparently it is supposed to explain Green's claim that Elcock was "deliberately atheoretic." If by this he means that Elcock was unaware of theory, he is generally correct, but it is certainly not true that there are no theoretical concerns in the book. In fact, Elcock made use of fragments of a number of different theories and theoretical insights, often without being aware that he was doing so, and certainly without any concern for consistency or applicability in his choice of theories.

Almost none of the defects and errors pointed out by Alarcos has been corrected in this edition, although Green seems to be especially interested in Spanish (in spite of some notable gaps in his knowledge of the language). For the most part, he has kept the text as Elcock wrote it. Indeed, most of it does not even seem to have been reset. What we find in general are occasional alterations of the wording, such as the addition or

**W. D. Elcock**, *The Romance languages*. 2nd edition, revised and with a new Introduction by John N. Green. London: Faber & Faber, 1975. Pp. 589.

In some ways, the task facing Green in attempting to revise Elcock's classic survey of the evolution of the modern Romance languages from popular spoken Latin was an almost impossible one. The broad 'humanistic' perspective of the work as a whole, coupled with its deliberately atheoretical approach, have engendered in a whole generation of students of Romance philology – the present reviewer included – a mixture of satisfaction at the wealth of fascinating material so readably presented and irritation that the failure to adopt a consistent theoretical standpoint led on so many occasions to the missing of generalizations and the failure to distinguish superficial formal changes from systematic changes of considerably greater significance. To this must be added the virtual total absence of any treatment of syntax, so much at the centre of linguistic interest almost continually in the fifteen years since the publication of the first edition.

In such circumstances, any reviser who attempts to do more than correct any obvious errors or anomalies and update the bibliography is treading on very dangerous ground indeed. One of the great strengths of the original is its unity: whatever one's views of the principles underlying Elcock's approach, the work is clearly successful on its own terms. What the second edition gives us is a brief introduction by Green (17–27), coupled with not insignificant revisions of the treatment of sound change, in terms of presentation, terminology and symbolization. (Phonetics and phonology are clearly distinguished, and IPA symbols are consistently used.) Elsewhere, however, very little is changed, apart from minor stylistic improvements. Above all, considerations of length precluded significant additions: the lacunae therefore must remain unfilled.

So what we have in effect is an approach to phonology which, while in my view certainly representing in itself an improvement, now appears noticeably out of line with the unchanged atheoretical approach of the rest of the book, together with the introduction, which raises tantalizingly a whole range of issues which are then never discussed further. One knows, too, just how well in other circumstances Green could have dealt with at least some of the points which are of necessity so cursorily passed over here. The question which constantly recurs on reading this work is: was it worth it? It is difficult to avoid the conclusion that we would have been better served by a re-impression – at a price well below £12, which places this edition quite out of reach of most students – together with an opportunity for Green to present his own views on at least some of the material with which Romance Linguistics concerns itself.

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(Received 30 January 1976)