



Bartholomew's Response Letters

King Derwin's Castle
Kingdom of Didd
20th year of King Derwin's Reign

Dear Sirs,

I am not sure if you are knights or monks or priests or scholars, so I chose "Sir" to address you. I am sure that you are not girls, because girls are not trained as scholars. I did get several letters, however, that were signed by people with names that we give to girls in my land. It is very strange. I am indebted to you for your rapid reply to my letter. Usually the post here is so slow that it may take up to a year to get mail.

Your world sounds like magic to me. How could you not have a King to rule you? We learn that Kings are always necessary. King Derwin would be so upset to hear that you are in a country where the government is ruled by a strange type of king called a president who needs to get permission for his decisions! Is someone born to be president? I also cannot imagine a world where so many are trained to read, write, and do sums! How did you ever have enough monks to write all the books that you must need?

We, too, must pay taxes so that the King may keep the highways safe from bandits and the kingdom running smoothly, but my education is much different. The chaplain does not allow us to play games, but I do enjoy lessons in using a sword best. I am not as good at the lance or battle-ax, but being polite and honorable comes easily to me (although not to my friend, Roland, who always gets boxed on his ears by the cook for being impudent on his errands). He makes me laugh, though.

As to your questions, I do know what a cow is. Some of the wealthier villagers would pasture their cows on the village green and, of course, the nobles and king have cows for meat and milk.

Describing myself is difficult. My hair is dark and it is cut around my ears, but it never hangs straight. It keeps curling and some of it in the middle sticks straight up! My eyes are small but curious (because I love to know things) and I am fairly puny compared to some of the other boys here at the castle. Still I can do the work required of me and I always try to be honorable.

I am in your debt for writing so thorough a description of your world! With this knowledge the chaplain will think that I am so smart and wise, that I should be an advisor to a squire. My good reputation might grow and the King might notice me and I might finally be able to become a squire!

With great respect,
Bartholomew Cubbins

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Dear Sir David,

How startled I was to learn you had 500 scholars in your school! They must come from all over your country. How do the other towns send letters or do business if all the scholars are with you? Our entire village only had 400 people! (My father tells me that before the Plague, the village used to be larger.)

You must be very rich to eat quail! Sometimes the knights and their ladies hunt with falcons and bring back delicious quail, partridge, and duck to be roasted for their table.

We, too, know of a Christmas, but it is different from yours. We think of it as the day our Lord in heaven was born and we pray and celebrate -- we eat mincemeat pies and nuts then--but we do not get presents, nor do I know of a generous man called Santa Claus. I wish he would come to the Kingdom of Didd, though!

Your house seems very grand! Your family must come from a noble house, so perhaps your father is called Lord Smithe. As to me, I, too, love a good joke. I think we could be friends if you would allow one so lowly born to befriend you.

I remain your servant,
Bartholomew Cubbins

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Dear Lady Sarah,

I am not sure if you are a lady or a townswoman--perhaps a nun. I have heard of few women who are allowed to become scholars! Usually they learn needlework, dance, and music instead of writing. You must be most unusual.

A numskull is a dull or stupid person. I like some of the other pages, especially Roland, who is my friend. He is so funny! One bright night he snuck in where the squires practice combat. He swiped an old cart horse and tried to charge at the wooden dummy the squires use to practice. When the squires hit it squarely, the dummy falls backward. But Roland only hit it a glancing blow and the wooden dummy swung around and struck him a hard blow. He fell off and then had to chase the old mare to get it back to the stable before it was missed. He had quite a bruise for a long time. He told the chaplain he got it falling down the long stairs while running to do Lady Eleanor's bidding. He is always doing something adventurous. I will refrain from telling you about some of the other pages who feel I am an upstart and should never have been allowed to begin training as a Knight.

Living in a castle is very exciting. There is much daily work to be done, even just to feed people. We do not have a "Burger King," although the steward who runs the kitchen for Lady Eleanor acts like a king. Cattle, sheep, poultry, and eggs, along with flour, fish, and fruit have to be brought in from the local villages or manors. Cooks, bakers, dairy-maids, and a butler (who sees to the beer and wine) prepare the food and drink for the household, although we eat after we have served others, so little that is special is left for us. There is a scullion in charge of plates, dishes, and cooking vessels. Most of us just use stale bread as our plates.

You have many wonderful animals. I am not familiar with a "guinea pig," but I could picture it in my mind from your description which gave me such a clear idea of its appearance. Many thanks for your letter which has shown me much about your world -- a truly incredible place!

Your servant,
Bartholomew Cubbins