

## PROBING THE COMMUNAL MIND

The Peirce Project depends on specialists from many fields for help in preparing our critical texts and editorial annotations. Although the heaviest burden falls on our regular contributing editors and advisors, we hope that through the newsletter we can extend the scope of communal involvement. In this issue we feature the answer to a question posed in the previous issue, as well as a continuing “mystery.” If you can shed more light on our unanswered question, please reply in writing or by e-mail to Associate Editor André De Tienne at [adetienn@iupui.edu](mailto:adetienn@iupui.edu).

### Question Answered:

**Poem Deciphered.** Shortly after the previous issue of the newsletter (3.2) appeared, we received an answer to question 17, which asked readers to help us decipher a coded poem. The solution came from Peirce’s own grandnephew, Jeremy Peirce, to whom we express our gratitude. (Upon learning who had deciphered the encryption, executive board member Arthur Burks remarked, “I suppose it runs in the genes.”)

The key to Peirce’s code is that each letter of the alphabet was assigned both a vowel-based cipher and a consonant cipher, according to the table below.

Plain text	Vowel cipher	Consonant cipher	Plain text	Vowel cipher	Consonant cipher
A	A	B	M	I	P
B	AL	C	N	IL	PH
C	AY	CH	O	IW	PS
D	AR	D	P	OL	S
E	AU	F	R	OR	SH
F	ER	G	S	OY	SK
G	E	GH	T	O	SM
H	EY	H	U	OW	SN
I	EL	J	V	UL	SP
K	IR	M	W	UR	ST
L	IE	N	Y	UO	TH

The text Peirce ciphered consists of the first two couplets of a famous three-couplet hymn by statesman and writer Joseph Addison (1672–1719). The hymn, “The Spacious Firmament on High,” was probably composed in 1712, the year of its publication, under the title “Ode,” in the *Spectator* (London: J. and R. Tonson). This hymn is said to have taken its inspiration from the first four verses of Psalm 19; it became very popular when Charles Wesley (1707–88) published it in his hymnal. It was later set to the music of F. J. Haydn’s oratorio *The Creation*. In his rendition, Peirce got seven words wrong (“ethereal” for “etherial” in line 2, “starry” for “spangled” and “spangled” for “shining” in line 3, “in” for “to” in line 7, “recounts” for “repeats” in line 12, “while” for “whilst” in line 13, “turn” for “roll” in line 15), which may indicate that he encoded the poem from memory. The three alternative readings we gave in the footnote to question 17 (“oys-mashoy,” “skolshaubar,” and “siwnau”) turn out to be the correct

ones. In addition, the third word of line 4 in the ciphered poem ought to read “iwshelghelphan” instead of “iwshelghelphau” (thus yielding the word “original” instead of “origine”; our misreading), while in line 15 “smeyth” ought to have been “smey-auth” (Peirce’s error). Here are the first two couplets of the “Ode”:

The spacious firmament on high,  
With all the blue ethereal sky,  
And spangled heavens, a shining frame,  
Their great Original proclaim.  
Th’unwearied sun, from day to day,  
Does his Creator’s power display;  
And publishes to every land  
The work of an almighty hand.

Soon as the evening shades prevail,  
The moon takes up the wondrous tale,  
And nightly to the listening earth  
Repeats the story of her birth:  
Whilst all the stars that round her burn,  
And all the planets in their turn,  
Confirm the tidings as they roll,  
And spread the truth from pole to pole.

### Question Unanswered:

**The Kirchheis Saga Continues.** Two times now we have put in the newsletter a question about the “famous” German philosopher Kirchheis. We had found two references by Peirce to Kirchheis. In his lecture on burlesque (R 1564), Peirce opened by writing: “My lecture will furnish a strict logical analysis of burlesque, and lay the foundations for the metaphysics of the subject, in a manner which I think must be met by the advocates of the theory of Kirchheis.” The reference suggests a certain familiarity with the theory of Kirchheis, possibly secondhand, and Peirce’s belief that there are advocates of this theory.

The second mention of the name “Kirchheis” is found in Peirce’s 1891 letter to the editor of the *Nation* (Ketner & Cook I:115–17) in support of F. E. Abbot, whose *Ways Out of Agnosticism* had been ferociously attacked by Royce. In his letter, Peirce noted that “philosophers of the highest standing” had spoken highly of Abbot’s work, and he gave three examples, one of whom was Kirchheiss (the second “s” may have been added by the editors of the *Nation*). Abbot himself was unfamiliar with Kirchheis’s praise of his work, as he asked in the letter in which he thanked Peirce for coming to his defense, “Will you kindly give me the reference to Kirchheiss’s mention of my work? I have not seen it.” We have not found any reply from Peirce, and extensive searches through library catalogs and biographical dictionaries, using all likely variations on the name, have not led anywhere.

Since the last newsletter, however, the quest for the celebrated Kirchheis has been propelled to new heights with the discovery of a third mention of his name. This discovery was made by Mathias Girel (Université Paris-I), who spent four weeks at the Peirce Project doing research for his dissertation. In a long and remarkably detailed footnote that follows a discussion of an argument for the immortality of the soul in Plato, Peirce wrote the following: “I hardly need say that the argument is known in Germany as the Kirchheis-Plato theory, owing to its having been