

To the Editors:

Diabolical work

It looks as if the printer's devil has become hell-bent on grammar!

I concluded my review of the book *Disinvesting in Health* with the remark: "The Buddha or the World Bank? that is the question. You pays your money and you takes your choice!" The printer's devil (or his agent) has altered the final sentence to read: "You pay your money and take your choice!" (1).

According to the Longman Dictionary of English Idioms (1979) the correct form of the relevant idiom is: "you pays your money and you takes your choice." Apparently, the idiom comes from a 19th-century rhyme: "Whatever you please, my little dears/You pays your money and you takes your choice...."

I well remember the occasion when I first learnt that idiom about 20 years ago. I went to see Professor S. R. Kottogoda in his office in the Pharmacology Department

of the Colombo Medical School and found him chuckling to himself. Before I could ask why he said, "Just before you came my typist Mr. A. interrupted his typing and came with my script and told me: "Sir, you have written here "You pays your money and you takes your choice", but that is bad grammar, no?"

I asked much lamented Prof. Kottogoda how he dealt with the grammar-conscious typist. He had told him, "Yes, you are right, but type it just like that because English is a funny language".

Please don't regard this letter as a nit-picking complaint. Far from it. In living memory, the *CMJ* has never been better edited than in recent times. Like me, the printer's devil is occasionally too clever by half.

References

1. Fonseka C. Book review. *Ceylon Medical Journal*, 2000; 45: 142-3.

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