

***GEORGE
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***IN PASTURES
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George Ade

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Contact: DigiCat@okpublishing.info



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IN LONDON

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CHAPTER I

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GETTING ACQUAINTED WITH THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE

It may be set down as a safe proposition that every man is a bewildered maverick when he wanders out of his own little bailiwick. Did you ever see a stock broker on a stock farm, or a cow puncher at the Waldorf?

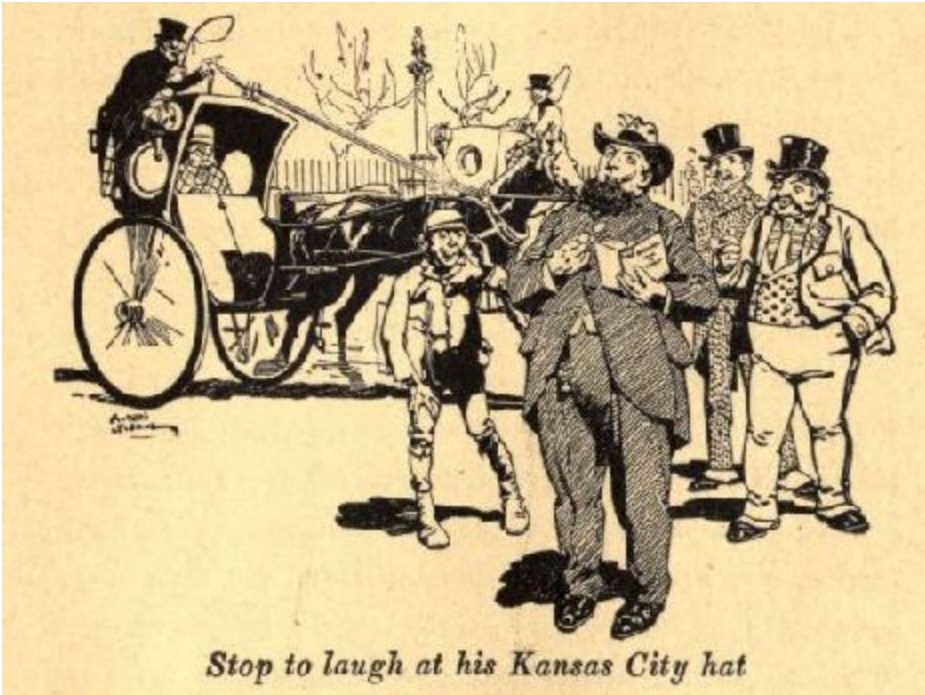
A man may be a large duck in his private puddle, but when he strikes deep and strange waters he forgets how to swim.

Take some captain of industry who resides in a large city of the Middle West. At home he is unquestionably IT. Everyone knows the size of his bank account, and when he rides down to business in the morning the conductor of the trolley holds the car for him. His fellow passengers are delighted to get a favouring nod from him. When he sails into the new office building the elevator captain gives him a cheery but deferential "good morning." In his private office he sits at a \$500 roll top desk from Grand Rapids, surrounded by push buttons, and when he gives the word someone is expected to hop. At noon he goes to his club for luncheon. The head waiter jumps over two chairs to get at

him and relieve him of his hat and then leads him to the most desirable table and hovers over him even as a mother hen broods over her first born.

This Distinguished Citizen, director of the First National Bank, trustee of the Cemetery Association, member of the Advisory Committee of the Y.M.C.A., president of the Saturday Night Poker Club, head of the Commercial Club, and founder of the Wilson County Trotting Association, is a whale when he is seated on his private throne in the corn belt. He rides the whirlwind and commands the storm. The local paper speaks of him in bated capital letters, and he would be more or less than human if he failed to believe that he was a very large gun.

Take this same Business Behemoth and set him down in Paris or Rome or Naples. With a red guide book clutched helplessly in his left hand and his right hand free, so that he can dig up the currency of the realm every thirty seconds, he sets forth to become acquainted with mediæval architecture and the work of the old masters. He is just as helpless and apprehensive as a country boy at Coney Island. The guides and cabmen bullyrag him. Newsboys and beggars pester him with impunity. Children in the street stop to laugh at his Kansas City hat known to the trade as a Fedora. When he goes into a shop the polite brigand behind the showcase charges him two prices and gives him bad money for change.



Stop to laugh at his Kansas City hat

Why? Because he is in a strange man's town, stripped of his local importance and battling with a foreign language. The man who cannot talk back immediately becomes a weakling.

What is the chief terror to travel? It is the lonesomeness of feeling that one cannot adapt himself to the unfamiliar background and therefore is sure to attract more or less attention as a curio. And in what city does this feeling of lonesomeness become most overwhelming? In London.

The American must go to England in order to learn for a dead certainty that he does not speak the English language. On the Continent if he kicks on the charges and carries a great deal of hand luggage and his clothes do not fit him any too well he may be mistaken for an Englishman. This great joy never awaits him in London.

I do not wish to talk about myself, yet I can say with truthfulness that I have been working for years to enrich the

English language. Most of the time I have been years ahead of the dictionaries. I have been so far ahead of the dictionaries that sometimes I fear they will never catch up. It has been my privilege to use words that are unknown to Lindley Murray. Andrew Lang once started to read my works and then sank with a bubbling cry and did not come up for three days.

It seems that in my efforts to enrich the English language I made it too rich, and some who tried it afterward complained of mental gastritis. In one of my fables, written in pure and undefiled Chicago, reference was made to that kind of a *table d'hôte* restaurant which serves an Italian dinner for sixty cents. This restaurant was called a "spaghetti joint." Mr. Lang declared that the appellation was altogether preposterous, as it is a well-known fact that spaghetti has no joints, being invertebrate and quite devoid of osseous tissue, the same as a caterpillar. Also he thought that "cinch" was merely a misspelling of "sink," something to do with a kitchen. Now if an American reeking with the sweet vernacular of his native land cannot make himself understood by one who is familiar with all the ins and outs of our language, what chance has he with the ordinary Londoner, who gets his vocabulary from reading the advertisements carried by sandwich men?

This pitiful fact comes home to every American when he arrives in London—there are two languages, the English and the American. One is correct; the other is incorrect. One is a pure and limpid stream; the other is a stagnant pool, swarming with bacilli. In front of a shop in Paris is a sign, "English spoken—American understood." This sign is just as

misleading as every other sign in Paris. If our English cannot be understood right here in England, what chance have we among strangers?

One of the blessed advantages of coming here to England is that every American, no matter how old he may be or how often he has assisted at the massacre of the mother tongue, may begin to get a correct line on the genuine English speech. A few Americans, say fifty or more in Boston and several in New York, are said to speak English in spots. Very often they fan, but sometimes they hit the ball. By patient endeavor they have mastered the sound of "a" as in "father," but they continue to call a clerk a clerk, instead of a "clark," and they never have gained the courage to say "leftenant." They wander on the suburbs of the English language, nibbling at the edges, as it were. Anyone living west of Pittsburg is still lost in the desert.

It is only when the Pilgrim comes right here to the fountain head of the Chaucerian language that he can drink deep and revive his parched intellect. For three days I have been camping here at the headwaters of English. Although this is my fourth visit to London and I have taken a thorough course at the music halls and conversed with some of the most prominent shopkeepers on or in the Strand, to say nothing of having chatted almost in a spirit of democratic equality with some of the most representative waiters, I still feel as if I were a little child playing by the seashore while the great ocean of British idioms lies undiscovered before me.

Yesterday, however, I had the rare and almost delirious pleasure of meeting an upper class Englishman. He has

family, social position, wealth, several capital letters trailing after his name (which is long enough without an appendix), an ancestry, a glorious past and possibly a future. Usually an American has to wait in London eight or ten years before he meets an Englishman who is not trying to sell him dress shirts or something to put on his hair. In two short days—practically at one bound—I had realised the full ambition of my countrymen.

Before being presented to the heavy swell I was taken into the chamber of meditation by the American who was to accompany me on this flight to glory. He prepared me for the ceremony by whispering to me that the chap we were about to meet went everywhere and saw everybody; that he was a Varsity man and had shot big game and had a place up country, and couldn't remember the names of all his clubs—had to hire a man by the year just to remember the names of his clubs.

May I confess that I was immensely flattered to know that I could meet this important person? When we are at long range we throw bricks at the aristocracy and landed gentry, but when we come close to them we tremble violently and are much pleased if they differentiate us from the furniture of the room.



Just to remember the names of his clubs

Why not tell the truth for once? I was tickled and overheated with bliss to know that this social lion was quite willing to sit alongside of me and breathe the adjacent atmosphere.

Also I was perturbed and stage frightened because I knew that I spoke nothing but the American language, and that probably I used my nose instead of my vocal chords in giving expression to such thoughts as might escape from me. Furthermore, I was afraid that during our conversation I might accidentally lapse into slang, and I knew that in Great Britain slang is abhorred above every other earthly thing

except goods of German manufacture. So I resolved to be on my guard and try to come as near to English speech as it is possible for anyone to come after he has walked up and down State street for ten years.

My real and ulterior motive in welcoming this interview with a registered Englishman was to get, free of charge, an allopathic dose of 24-karat English. I wanted to bask in the bright light of an intellect that had no flickers in it and absorb some of the infallibility that is so prevalent in these parts.

We met. I steadied myself and said:—"I'm glad to know you—that is, I am extremely pleased to have the honour of making your acquaintance."

He looked at me with a kindly light in his steel blue eye, and after a short period of deliberation spoke as follows:—"Thanks."



"Thanks"

"Thanks"

"The international developments of recent years have been such as should properly engender a feeling of the warmest brotherhood between all branches of the Anglo-Saxon race," I said. "I don't think that any fair-minded American has it in for Great Britain—that is, it seems to me that all former resentment growing out of early conflicts between the two countries has given way to a spirit of tolerant understanding. Do you not agree with me?"

He hesitated for a moment, as if not desiring to commit himself by a hasty or impassioned reply, and then delivered himself as follows:—"Quite."

"It seems to me," I said, following the same line of thought, "that fair-minded people on both sides of the water are getting sore—that is, losing patience with the agitators who preach the old doctrine that our attitude toward Great Britain is necessarily one of enmity. We cannot forget that when the European Powers attempted to concert their influence against the United States at the outset of the late war with Spain you bluffed them out—that is, you induced them to relinquish their unfriendly intentions. Every thoughtful man in America is on to this fact—that is, he understands how important was the service you rendered us—and he is correspondingly grateful. The American people and the English people speak the same language, theoretically. Our interests are practically identical in all parts of the world—that is, we are trying to do everybody, and so are you. What I want to convey is that neither nation can properly work out its destiny except by co-operating with the other. Therefore any policy looking toward a severance of friendly relations is unworthy of consideration."

"Rot!" said he.

"Just at present all Americans are profoundly grateful to the British public for its generous recognition of the sterling qualities of our beloved Executive," I continued. "Over in the States we think that 'Teddy' is the goods—that is, the people of all sections have unbounded faith in him. We think he is on the level—that is, that his dominant policies are guided by the spirit of integrity. As a fair-minded Briton, who is keeping in touch with the affairs of the world, may I ask you your candid opinion of President Roosevelt?"

After a brief pause he spoke as follows:—"Ripping!"

"The impulse of friendliness on the part of the English people seems to be more evident year by year," I continued. "It is now possible for Americans to get into nearly all the London hotels. You show your faith in our monetary system by accepting all the collateral we can bring over. No identification is necessary. Formerly the visiting American was asked to give references before he was separated from his income—that is, before one of your business institutions would enter into negotiations with him. Nowadays you see behind the chin whisker the beautiful trade mark of consanguinity. You say, 'Blood is thicker than water,' and you accept a five-dollar bill just the same as if it were an English sovereign worth four dollars and eighty-six cents."

"Jolly glad to get it," said he.

"Both countries have adopted the gospel of reciprocity," I said, warmed by this sudden burst of enthusiasm. "We send shiploads of tourists over here. You send shiploads of English actors to New York. The tourists go home as soon as they are broke—that is, as soon as their funds are exhausted. The English actors come home as soon as they are independently rich. Everybody is satisfied with the arrangement and the international bonds are further strengthened. Of course, some of the English actors blow up—that is, fail to meet with any great measure of financial success—when they get out as far as Omaha, but while they are mystifying the American public some of our tourists are going around London mystifying the British public. Doubtless you have seen some of these tourists?"

The distinguished person nodded his head in grave acquiescence and then said with some feeling:

—"Bounders!"

"In spite of these breaches of international faith the situation taken as a whole is one promising an indefinite continuation of cordial friendship between the Powers," I said. "I am darned glad that such is the case; ain't you?"

"Rather," he replied.

Then we parted.

It was really worth a long sea voyage to be permitted to get the English language at first hand; to revel in its unexpected sublimities, and gaze down new and awe-inspiring vistas of rhetorical splendour.

CHAPTER II

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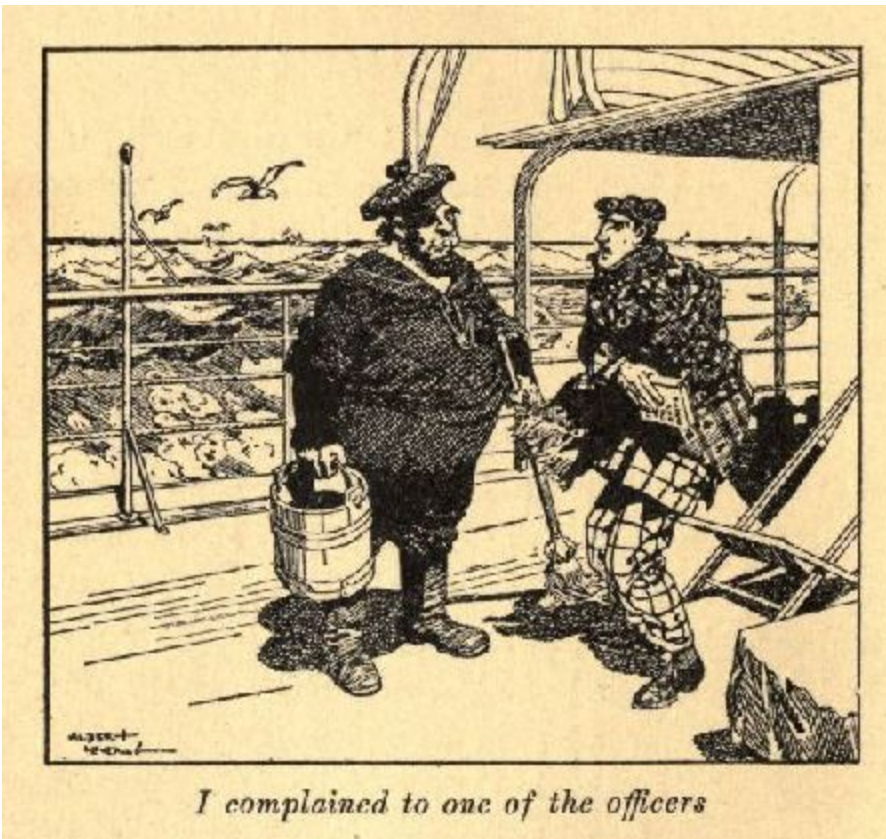
A LIFE ON THE OCEAN WAVE, WITH MODERN VARIATIONS

A month before sailing I visited the floating skyscraper which was to bear us away. It was hitched to a dock in Hoboken, and it reminded me of a St. Bernard dog tied by a silken thread. It was the biggest skiff afloat, with an observatory on the roof and covered porches running all the way around. It was a very large boat.

After inspecting the boat and approving of it, I selected a room with southern exposure. Later on, when we sailed, the noble craft backed into the river and turned round before heading for the Old World, and I found myself on the north

side of the ship, with nothing coming in at the porthole except a current of cold air direct from Labrador.

This room was on the starboard or port side of the ship—I forget which. After travelling nearly one million miles, more or less, by steamer, I am still unable to tell which is starboard and which is port. I can tell time by the ship's bell if you let me use a pencil, but "starboard" means nothing to me. In order to make it clear to the reader, I will say that the room was on the "haw" side of the boat. I thought I was getting the "gee" side as the vessel lay at the dock, but I forgot that it had to turn around in order to start for Europe, and I found myself "haw." I complained to one of the officers and said that I had engaged a stateroom with southern exposure. He said they couldn't back up all the way across the Atlantic just to give me the sunny side of the boat. This closed the incident. He did explain, however, that if I remained in the ship and went back with them I would have southern exposure all the way home.



I complained to one of the officers

Our ship was the latest thing out. To say that it was about seven hundred feet long and nearly sixty feet beam and 42,000 tons displacement does not give a graphic idea of its huge proportions. A New Yorker might understand if told that this ship, stood on end, would be about as tall as two Flatiron buildings spliced end to end.

Out in Indiana this comparison was unavailing, as few of the residents have seen the Flatiron Building and only a small percentage of them have any desire to see it. So when a Hoosier acquaintance asked me something about the ship I led him out into Main Street and told him that it would reach from the railroad to the Presbyterian church. He looked down street at the depot and then he looked up street at the distant Presbyterian church, and then he

looked at me and walked away. Every statement that I make in my native town is received with doubt. People have mistrusted me ever since I came home years ago and announced that I was working.

Evidently he repeated what I had said, for in a few minutes another resident came up and casually asked me something about the ship and wanted to know how long she was. I repeated the Presbyterian church story. He merely remarked "I thought 'Bill' was lyin' to me," and then went his way.

It is hard to live down a carefully acquired reputation, and therefore the statement as to the length of the vessel was regarded as a specimen outburst of native humour. When I went on to say that the boat would have on board three times as many people as there were in our whole town, that she had seven decks, superimposed like the layers of a jelly cake, that elevators carried passengers from one deck to another, that a daily newspaper was printed on board, and that a brass band gave concerts every day, to say nothing of the telephone exchange and the free bureau of information, then all doubt was dispelled and my local standing as a dealer in morbid fiction was largely fortified.

The chief wonder of our new liner (for all of us had a proprietary interest the moment we came aboard) was the system of elevators. Just think of it! Elevators gliding up and down between decks the same as in a modern office building. Very few passengers used the elevators, but it gave us something to talk about on board ship and it would give us something to blow about after we had returned home.

Outside of the cage stood a young German with a blonde pompadour and a jacket that came just below his shoulder blades. He was so clean he looked as if he had been scrubbed with soap and then rubbed with holystone. Every German menial on board seemed to have two guiding ambitions in life. One was to keep himself immaculate and the other was to grow a U-shaped moustache, the same as the one worn by the Kaiser.

The boy in charge of the elevator would plead with people to get in and ride. Usually, unless he waylaid them, they would forget all about the new improvement and would run up and down stairs in the old-fashioned manner instituted by Noah and imitated by Christopher Columbus.

This boy leads a checkered career on each voyage. When he departs from New York he is the elevator boy. As the vessel approaches Plymouth, England, he becomes the lift attendant. At Cherbourg he is transformed into a *garçon d'ascenseur*, and as the ship draws near Hamburg he is the *Aufzugsbehueter*, which is an awful thing to call a mere child.

Goodness only knows what will be the ultimate result of present competition between ocean liners. As our boat was quite new and extravagantly up-to-date, perhaps some information concerning it will be of interest, even to those old and hardened travellers who have been across so often that they no longer set down the run of the ship and have ceased sending pictorial post-cards to their friends at home.

In the first place, a telephone in every room, connected with a central station. The passenger never uses it, because when he is a thousand miles from shore there is no one to

be called up, and if he needs the steward he pushes a button. But it is there—a real German telephone, shaped like a broken pretzel, and anyone who has a telephone in his room feels that he is getting something for his money.

After two or three lessons any American can use a foreign telephone. All he has to learn is which end to put to his ear and how to keep two or three springs pressed down all the time he is talking. In America he takes down the receiver and talks into the 'phone. Elsewhere he takes the entire telephone down from a rack and holds it the same as a slide trombone.



Holds it the same as a slide trombone

Holds it the same as a slide trombone

In some of the cabins were electric hair curlers. A Cleveland man who wished to call up the adjoining cabin on the 'phone, just to see if the thing would work, put the hair curler to his ear and began talking into the dynamo. There