Autobiography of George Ade

My father was John Ade, born at Lewes, England, and his mother's maiden name had been Hazleton. My mother's name was Adaline Bush and my maternal grandmother was an Adair. This wing of the tribe came to Ohio and Kentucky by way of the Carolinas. I am English on my father's side, American-Scotch-Irish on my mother's side and came on the scene youngest of seven children and the youngest of the boys. From the time I could read I had my nose in a book and I lacked enthusiasm for manual labor.

After high school I attended Purdue University, taking the scientific course because I had no ambition to be an engineer or an agriculturist. A star student as a Freshman but wobbly later on and a total loss in Mathematics. In 1887 I received my B.S. from Purdue and the same school gave me an L.H.D. in 1926. Indiana University made me an L.L.D. in 1927, but I am seldom addressed as “Doctor.”

Between 1887 and 1890 I did all sorts of work for two LaFayette newspapers and rather enjoyed a brief experience with a company making patent medicines and developing a health resort. Went to Chicago in 1890 and found a job as a reporter on the staff of The Morning News, later known as The Record. By 1892 I was covering outside assignments, such as the Homestead strike in Pennsylvania and the Sullivan–Corbett fight at New Orleans. All during the Columbian Exposition of 1893 I wrote special “human interest” stories about the World's Fair. From the fall of 1893 until 1900 had charge of a two column story department, the illustrations provided by John T. McCutcheon, who had been my friend at Purdue and with whom I roomed for many years. In 1900 I did my last newspaper work and went out to China, Japan and the Phillipines on a visit. Before that I had been to Europe twice and published five books. My early story stuff was intended to be “realistic” and I believed firmly in short words and short sentences. By a queer twist of circumstances I have become known to the general public as a
“humorist” and a writer of “slang.” I never wanted to be a comic or tried to be one. The playful vernacular and idiomatic talk of the street and the fanciful figures of speech which came out for years under the heading of “Fables in Slang” had no relation whatever to the cryptic language of the underworld or the patois of the criminal element. Always I wrote for the “family trade” and I used no word or phrase which might give offense to mother and the girls or a professor of English.

Having been absurdly in line with the theater for years I found time, after I began syndicating my Fables in 1900, to make a shy attempt at writing for the stage. A talented young Englishman named Alfred Wathall induced me to write the book and verses for a musical satire to be called “The Sultan of Sulu” and produced by a club of aspiring amateurs, Wathall doing the music. Henry Savage, well-known as a manager, induced me to permit him to give our light opera a professional production. It was whipped into shape and made a success. Later on I wrote the dialogue and “lyrics” for musical pieces known as “Peggy from Paris,” “The Sho Gun,” “The Fair Co-Ed,” and “The Old Town.” The plays without music which might be worth remembering were “The County Chairman,” “The College Widow,” “Just Out of College,” and “Father and the Boys.” I had three failures.

In 1905 I took up a permanent residence at Hazelden Farm near Brook, Indiana, and within fifteen miles of my birth-place. I have been away from this place very few summers since that time but the wanderlust was upon me every autumn. On checking up I learn that I have been to Europe ten times, cruised through the West Indies eleven times, visited China and Japan four times and, also, I have looped the globe twice.

Ever since I settled down in the country I have been involved in activities which did not call my name to the attention of the general public but which have been an interesting part of my career. In 1908 I was a delegate to the Republican National Convention and a member of the Notification Committee. Mr. Taft opened his campaign on my home grounds at Hazelden. Four campaigns later (1924) Gen. Dawes closed his speaking tour at Hazelden.

In 1910 I was elected Grand Consul of the Sigma Chi college fraternity and gave most of my time for two years to an effort to arouse and organize the “brothers.” During the World War I was a member of the Indiana State Council of Defense, directing publicity. From 1913 to the present time (1933) I have promoted the Hazelden Country Club which has attractive buildings and a good
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golf course adjoining my home. Ten years ago David Ross, a worthy graduate of Purdue and now President of the Board of Trustees, invited me to go with him on an enterprise which involved the purchase of sixty-five acres of land, the incorporating of the Ross-Ade stadium, high up on a majestic hill overlooking the campus and the Wabash Valley. It was not a million-dollar extravagance. A glacial drift, some time ago, did most of the excavating. It seats 25,000 people and is almost a replica of the stadium at Athens. Purdue began to climb toward Big Ten ascendancy on the day we dedicated the stadium.

For quite a number of years I paid more attention to Purdue and various activities in my home state than I did to writing for the magazines.

I have done a number of short plays which have been played many times: “Mrs. Peckham’s Carouse,” “Marse Covington,” “The Mayor and the Manicure,” and “Nettie.” The moving pictures for which I wrote the stories include “Back Home and Broke” and “Our Leading Citizen.” I wrote others, but by the time they arrived on the screen they bore no resemblance to what I had turned in at the studios.

I am a bachelor but I prefer to live in my own home. My enthusiasms include golf, travel, horse-racing and the spoken drama. My antipathies are social show-offs, bigots on religion, fanatics on total abstinence, and all persons who take themselves seriously. I read all the periodicals, sober and frivolous, sacred and profane, and try to know what is going on in the world. I have card-index memory for the words and music of old hymns, old popular songs and old “numbers” from the light operas of day before yesterday. I love to put on big parties or celebrations and see a throng of people having a good time.

As I have a certain rating as an author, perhaps I should mention that the books number twenty, not counting some eight or ten published plays. Those not containing Fables may be listed as follows: ARTIE, PINK MARSH, DOC HORNE, IN PASTURES NEW, THE SLIM PRINCESS, SINGLE BLESSEDNESS AND OTHER OBSERVATIONS, BANG! BANG!, and THE OLD-TIME SALOON.

I nearly forgot to say that I am a member of the National Institute of Arts and Letters and on the Executive Committee of the Authors Guild, and, under an alphabetical arrangement, my name was first on the list of those selected to direct the efforts of the Association for the Repeal of the Eighteenth Amendment. I belong to
no secret orders and I do not choose to make speeches or listen to speeches.

Ade wrote Stanley J. Kunitz, March 30, 1933 (InLP); that this sketch was “the hardest writing job that I ever tackled and I am in great doubt what to say about myself.”