At age seventeen, George Ade entered Purdue University on September 10, 1883, already a “published writer” back home in the Gazette. Twenty-some years later, his essay “The Day I Arrived” told about Lafayette and Purdue during his first hours as a freshman:

I remember that the sun was shining and the harvest fields on both sides of the Big Four [Railroad] line were dry and yellow, but I was not greatly concerned as to the weather conditions. My subconsciousness was trying to adapt itself to the overwhelming fact that I was about to venture into the Big Arena and fight for my life. The masterminds of the 19th century were waiting to discover me in the roadway and then crush me beneath the Juggernaut of infinite superiority. The high school lambkin was headed for the jungle where wild animals roamed.

The train had come thirty miles and already I was homesick. Wedged between my feet was a glittering valise of the kind that will stand up unless the rain happens to strike it. In my left hand I clutched a worn copy of the Annual Catalog and Register. One section was charted with information for the guidance of those struggling toward the light. Board would cost $2.50 a week. With due economy as to the items of “laundry” and “sundries,” the annual expenditures could be held down to $185—or say $200 a year when accompanied by riotous living. It seemed a lot of money to spend foolishly.
The courses of study were exhibited as towering pyramids, supported by brackets. The lower planes invited one to geometry and botany. The topmost heights up among the clouds, four years away, were marked Psychology, Analytical Chemistry and Political Economy. The more I looked at them the more evident it became that they were inaccessible. The cry of “Excelsior!” rose very faintly within my timid soul. My vision was not sufficiently prophetic to enable me to see myself in 1887 seated on the topmost pinnacle wearing a $30 Prince Albert suit and preparing a thesis on “Literature In the West.”

The train rolled into the broad bottomlands of the Wabash [River], and I saw above the cornfields the clustered spires and massive walls of a great city. It looked like London, Paris, Vienna and New York welded together into one gigantic capital. To this day [1903], I never visit Lafayette without stopping to gaze at the Courthouse and wonder how it is possible to trim down a building to one-third its former size without destroying the symmetry. I looked down at the river and identified it as the Rubicon, after which the valise and I found ourselves in a multitude of thirty or more persons on a long platform on Second Street.

All of these persons seemed especially hardened to city life and indifferent to the trembling uncertainties of young persons from far distant points. The Annual Catalog and Register had given specific directions to govern one suddenly alighting from a train, so I stood on the platform holding firmly to my property and waiting for the next Turn of Fate.

Then Charlie Martin came into my life. Years may come and years may go, and memory may fail me regarding people and incidents of a quarter century ago, but Charlie Martin will always stand out in the solitary splendor of a landmark, silhouetted against a purple sky. Charlie drove an express wagon. He named a price for delivering my trunk to the dormitory, and said he would let me ride on the wagon. I had no trunk. He allowed me
to substitute the valise. Why no trunk? Well, I had yet to pass my entrance examinations, and it seemed advisable not to stock up with all the shirts, underwear, and towels carefully set down in the Annual Catalog and Register until I felt sure that I could squirm through the portals and be enrolled on the heavenly list as a Real Freshman.

Anyone familiar with conditions on the Purdue campus in the autumn of 1883 will tell you that I should have brought the trunk. There was no possible chance of my not landing as a freshman. Along about that time any human being between the ages of fifteen and twenty, who ventured anywhere near Purdue’s campus and showed the slightest symptoms of acquiring a college education was roped and dragged into the Registrar’s office. A few “conditions” more or less cut very little figure. Purdue needed students, and needed them badly. Those on hand were to be treated kindly, and fed with a spoon as long as they gave reasonable evidences of human intelligence and came to recitations once in a while. In those happy days there was no merciless “weeding out”—no cruel and terrifying “flunk tests.” The sword of Damocles was not doing business. The man who wanted to leave school had to commit arson or homicide, or something like that.

One commander had left and another was coming aboard. He had not been given time to organize his crew, set things to rights and get the ship back into her course. Purdue seemed to be wobbling, not to say floundering. The storms had buffeted, provisions were running low, and the hands had not been paid for months. Having offered these figurative allusions, I will get back to cold facts.

President [James A.] Smart and I arrived on the scene at practically the same moment. He came in a phaeton, and I came in Charlie Martin’s express wagon. That day marked the turning point of the struggle to establish a school of technology in Indiana. Dr. Smart found a weakling and trained it into robust manhood.
The first great task confronting him was to build up the attendance. We lived by favor of the legislature, and the legislature had a way of dividing the total outlay by the enrollment, the result showing a per capita expense that was simply staggering. In order to reduce the per capita extravagance and smooth the way for shops, laboratories and more professors, the University needed more students. Profs stood at every entrance to the campus waiting to welcome them.

I was not acquainted with these facts. As we rode through the old boxed-in Main Street Bridge and across the narrow levee, with a boardwalk propped against one side of it, I felt sure that I was approaching the horrors of the Inquisition. I expected to be tried and found unworthy, and sent back home. At the foot of Chauncey Hill was a little cluster of wooden buildings. The long grade was sparsely bordered with dwelling houses. At the top of the hill was a lonesome drugstore, the only student rendezvous of the period. That part of the campus lying east of the carriage gate was then boarding houses.

"Yonder she is," Charlie Martin called as they reached the Purdue campus at the summit of Chauncey Hill. George Ade stepped out and, carrying his bag, trudged along a gravel walk to register. The University was only nine years old and, as Ade noticed, "the plaster was nearly dry" (Kelly, Ade, 49).

The old Main Building held the center of the campus, and seemed a trifle larger than St. Peter’s at Rome. The other buildings were the Ladies’ Hall, the Chemical Lab, the Engine House, that venerable ark known as Military Hall, and a neglected annex across the roadway.

Mr. Martin delivered me at the dorm. A soft-spoken prof with gold spectacles, a pink-and-white complexion and a complete set of auburn whiskers, took me by the hand and told me I was welcome, and suggested that I send for my trunk. He was afraid that
if I went back to get it, they might lose me. He conducted me to a room on the third floor of the barracks where I met two Comanches from Sullivan, Indiana, who were to be my cellmates. He [the prof] pointed out a straw stack in a field to the west, and gave me some helpful suggestions in regard to filling the bed-tick. Then he led me to the Registrar and helped me to remember my full name, he also steered me to the Boarding Hall where I burned my bridges behind me and paid a month in advance.

George’s room, one he considered a “chamber of monastic simplicity,” cost fifty cents per week. Most freshmen, he noticed, wore their Sunday clothes. “The ready-made cravat was favored, and a full-sized Ascot was about the size of a lily pad,” he wrote. “The horseshoe stickpin was regarded as a natty effect. The Derby hat with wide brim and low crown seemed to have been made in a foundry” (Kelly, Ade, 50).

George paid to take his meals—at two dollars and fifty cents per week—in the Ladies Hall. “When the waitress asked if you wanted fruit,” Ade later wrote, “you got dried currants with here and there a stem and some gravel.” He also wrote:

Returning to my room in the dorm, I found awaiting me the two from Sullivan who informed me that the sterling drama Fogg’s Ferry would be presented at the Opera House that evening over in Lafayette by Minnie Evans and Company, and that gallery seats were 25 cents each. As we went down the hill together, I began to feel almost like a Regular. Within a week I was leaning out of the window to pity the “fresh fish” Charlie Martin delivered every day.

Ade impressed his fellow freshmen about having seen the “awful good show” over in Lafayette. Before long, he knew every boy in the dorm and had collected a circle of friends. In his quiet, shy way, he showed an interest in everyone. His room became a rallying place for engrossing conversation. George had an engaging way of telling stories, often based on his uncanny observations of people and mannerisms in Chapel or in classrooms that the others
missed. He merely stated what he had seen unobserved by others, in ways that brought laughter. He and his pals would sit around in stocking feet, playing cards and smoking.

"During my collegiate days I smoked cigarettes and a pipe," Ade wrote. "The Lone Jack and Marburg mixtures were popular in the 1880s. The favorite cigarettes were Sweet Caps [Caporals] and Richmond Straight Cuts" (Tobin 130).

During the months of George’s “monastic” Purdue life, local events swirled all about. Some he noticed, some he did not. In both 1883 and 1884, for instance, September attendance at the Tippecanoe County Fair dropped noticeably. This was because organized temperance forces were boycotting the county’s licensing of beer sales at the fair, hot weather or not. In November 1883, Purdue began rising in importance because of its weather station. W. H. Ragan was directing a statewide cadre of thirty-two volunteer observers who reported data to him at Purdue. Five Lafayette brothers named Cox, in December 1883, introduced the Evening Call. This Republican newspaper remained in business until 1905. At 4 a.m. on January 5, 1884, one of Ragan’s devices measured minus twenty-eight degrees—the coldest reading since record keeping had begun at Purdue in 1880. A stronger newspaper, the evening Courier, estimated that about three hundred subscribers were using telephones. In February 1884, nine Lafayette partners put up thirty thousand dollars and opened a Brush Electric Lighting Company branch to sell incandescent lamps for homes. Later that year, Purdue started a School of Pharmacy.

George opted to enroll for courses leading to the degree of Bachelor of Science at Purdue. This allowed him to dodge higher math. Engineering types in his dorm helped him with math the first year. However, when he faced higher algebra in his third term and tried to fathom it without dorm help, his best mark was sixty.

Still, he came to be known as a hard worker during the first two years. Students who can do that, he observed, would be surprised
at what they can get away with later. He proved to be good at drawing and history, and best in English composition and literature. He scored one hundred in each of three written literature tests. His essays ranked above average. In his sophomore year, he became one of the editors of a monthly, The Purdue, but stayed at that position less than a year. The Purdue printed one of his freshman essays, “Habit and Character.” It began:

The person whose qualities form the ideal character will be truthful and high-minded. He will respect others and yet maintain sufficient self-respect or individuality to resent insults or encroachments upon his rights. He will be ambitious when it leads to some noble end; generous and charitable when it helps a worthy cause. (Kelly, Ade, 53-54)

As a sophomore, Ade contributed pieces titled “Local News” to the monthly in January 1885, and “Romeo and Juliet” in May.

Purdue offered three literary societies—strong rivals—that met Friday nights for recitations, orations, and debates. One was named the Philoletheans, one for Thomas Carlyle, and the other for Washington Irving. George joined the Irvings and learned to detest the other two because many of them “lived in Lafayette and wore scarf-pins!” (Kelly, Ade, 55).

In George’s senior year, The Purdue published his “Education by Contact” in December 1886. This serious and polished essay contained as excerpts:

Few men possess a thorough knowledge of both men and books. Knowledge of the first characterizes the speculator and politician. A companionship of books develops the scholarly qualities. A proper knowledge of the two, men and books, fits a man for almost any sphere or capacity, disqualifying him for none...

We can easily imagine...that the confident Bachelor, fresh from Commencement honors, is totally unfitted for contact with men in business and society circles. He may secure exemption grades for
four years and possess the unbounded regard of the spectacled professors and yet prove a boor in society and a mannikin in conversation. Such a man will be compelled to learn by hard experience, with men less considerate than his college mates, several simple rules of conduct. Perhaps he will never learn them.

The world does not request the college man to show his diploma and class record. It will judge him very largely by his actions when thrown into contact with men...

College organizations under the management and supervision of the students form a happy supplement to routine work. The old-fashioned literary societies should not lose their prominence in American colleges. They have taken hundreds of awkward country boys and made of them easy writers and forcible speakers. They tend to bring out the qualities of leadership, teaching one to be unassuming when victorious and to remain calm under defeat...

Athletic, social, scientific and other associations bring the student into various combinations with his fellows. The most successful institutions are marked by their presence. They dissolve class distinctions, bring the untrained into contact with the trained; the neophyte and veteran are thrown together. Their entire effect is stimulating.

The formation of steadfast friendship with congenial spirits is rightly judged to be the most potent factor in true education... Happy is he who has learned the beauty and worth of true friendship. The sweet sincerity of joy and peace, which I drew from this alliance with my brother’s soul, is the nut itself, whereof all nature and all thought is but the husk and shell. (Hepburn and Sears, 181-182)
Ade also went on remembering his Purdue beginnings in “Only Forty Years Ago This Summer”:

We had a total attendance of about two hundred, including the Prep Department. Most of the men who did not live at their own homes nearby camped out in the old dormitory. The boarding house for the campus residents was in the Ladies’ Hall. Some of us who were aristocratic took our food at this boarding establishment and paid the high rate of $2.50 a week. But the frugal souls organized a boarding club just across the road from the campus, and succeeded in getting through every week for something less than $2.

There was no attempt to organize athletics. We had no football team, no basketball team, no track team and no gymnasium. Along in the spring a baseball team would be organized and it would play with local teams and possibly hook up once in a while with Wabash College. We had no fraternity houses and no recognized fraternities. The important organizations that divided the student body into factions were literary societies, and all the interest centered on them.

There was no street railway to Lafayette, not even a stage line, and when we went skylarking to the city we either tramped across the old levee and through the tunnel-like bridge built of wood or else stole a ride from some farmer. There was one “dress suit” in the dormitory, and the owner of it was a subject of ridicule. We were much addicted to bandwagon rides out into the country and innocent parties pulled off at a minimum of expense. (1923 Purdue Debris)

George Ade’s teacher of English composition, Anna Mont McRae, strongly influenced him. Among the class notes he saved for the rest of his life was one that read, “Concrete ideas render a
composition beautiful by filling the mind with pictures. The abstract is dry and devoid of power over the imagination.”

Another said, “A sentence may be constructed in accordance with the rules for concord, clearness and unity and still produce little effect. Something is wanting to fix the attention and sustain the interest.”

Other notes reminded him of the importance of “fitting the words to convey the idea with force” and “to avoid use of newly coined words.”

As the years passed and George adjusted to the life of a student away from home, going to the theater in Lafayette rated as his best weekend means of celebration. Admission to the second gallery in the stately brick and stone Grand Opera House cost only a quarter. “After a performance,” George reminisced, “we went to the Globe Chop House where, for fifteen cents, one might get a small steak resembling a warped ear-muff, a boiled potato, bread and butter and coffee. After we had supped at our leisure and turned in our verdict on the play and the players, each one bought and lighted a fragrant five-cent cigar and then the jovial company went trooping back across the levee asserting in song that we had been working on the railroad all the livelong day, which was far from the truth” (Kelly, Ade, 57).

Besides his devotion to Opera House fare, George liked circuses. A top thrill was the traveling P. T. Barnum “Greatest Show on Earth” and its elephant named Jumbo. George could also be found in the second gallery at the Opera House for minstrel shows. Of all the offerings he saw during his student days, though, a light opera during his junior year topped everything prior. It was The Mikado with words and music by Gilbert and Sullivan. The lilting production opened new worlds to George. As he and his pals walked back to the dorm across the levee, Ade astounded his friends by how much Mikado he could sing from memory. In those days, Purdue had no glee club, no band, no drama club, no daily
paper, and no athletic association. So George took no part in events beyond being a spectator and, at times, an amused and amusing commentator.

In his junior year of 1885-1886, George joined a Greek-letter fraternity. The Delta Delta Chapter of Sigma Chi rented a room over a store at Fourth and Main in Lafayette for meetings but supported no chapter house. George remained in the dormitory. Sigma Chi had won a legal battle, mostly against the rigid policies of former Purdue President Emerson E. White. The court had denied any state university the right to bar fraternity members from classes. George was proud to have been invited to join Sigma Chi and wore the biggest fraternity pin he could buy. Years later, when his fondness for Sigma Chi had multiplied many times over, he laughed at old snapshots showing his big pin as an example of what he called the “absolute yappiness” of his college days.

One future and famous Sigma Chi fraternity brother, cartoonist John Tinney McCutcheon, wrote in his autobiography:

Along in my sophomore year one of the Sigma Chis was delegated by his chapter to look me over. It was the same youth whose profile I had been admiring from afar, and whose name turned out to be George Ade.

Evidently George’s report on me was favorable because I was invited to become a Sig. From that day began a relationship that remained one of the most valued throughout my life. The greatest asset Sigma Chi gave me was the friendship of George Ade. He was thin and tall and wore a sedate blue suit with tight spring-bottomed trousers that flared out at the ankle...

“[Ade had] the most extraordinary memory. His experiences, his endless assortment of humorous stories, the words of songs and quotations—his grip on all these always astonished me. He remembered vividly common experiences we had—people we met and what they said—things that faded completely from my
memory. As a raconteur he was unrivaled.” (McCutcheon, *Drawn from Memory*, 44-45)

McCutcheon was a “local” from a Wea Township farm home a few miles south of Lafayette. His father, a personable Civil War captain, livestock drover, and county sheriff, attracted friends. John T. McCutcheon reflected his father’s graciousness, warmth, and charm all his life as an artist, writer, and traveler.

McCutcheon first met Ade in 1884, in Chapel, and he remembered how “an unusual face down among the sophomores—a refined, clean-cut, delicately aquiline face—stood out among the surrounding run of rugged, freckled, corn-fed features. Later I learned that the possessor of this cameo-like profile was George Ade. The name appealed to me as much as the face. He had three outstanding characteristics that made him an inviting subject for caricature—an unusual expanse of head behind the ears, a sweep of strongly marked eyebrows and a striking lack of abdominal fullness, described by realists as slab belly...Even my undeveloped instinct told me that here was an exceptional person” (Kelly, *Ade*, 61).

McCutcheon showed a knack for drawing. He began to illustrate for Purdue printed programs and publications. His work included caricatures of Ade. He and Ade became friends. After George invited John to become a Sigma Chi, the two became inseparable. McCutcheon continued:

The Wabash River was in high flood. I don’t know why we thought this would be a good time to go boating, but George Ade, Jasper “Jap” Dresser and I rowed up the old Wabash & Erie Canal channel and then, some miles up, portaged the boat over into the Wabash and started down with the current, a mad rush homeward. Darkness came on. We shot under the Brown Street Bridge and then through the gloom we saw we were headed for one of the stone piers of the Main Street Bridge. Frantically we used our oars and barely cleared it but did not see the tree that jutted out from the tangled mass lodged against the pier and overhanging the swirling water by only a couple of feet. We ducked and tried
to ward it off with our hands but the current yanked the boat out from under us. We were left dangling from the tree, our legs in the rushing water.

Finally somebody crossing the bridge heard us, and after a long time old Joker Hill came and rescued us. Joker Hill was the boatman at the end of the bridge, and we had chartered our craft from him. Later it transpired that he had first rescued his boat, thus detracting somewhat from the nobility of his heroic deed. (McCutcheon, *Drawn from Memory*, 46)

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A Thanksgiving season treat for Ade and other theatergoers, in 1885, proved to be Lillian Russell starring in *Polly* in two shows in the Grand Opera House. The following April, Opera House patrons welcomed prizefighter John L. Sullivan and his touring “athletic troupe.”

As his college days drew to a close, George Ade’s library was growing. He bought books at a secondhand dealer’s shop in Lafayette. His personal bookplate contained the warning “He who borrows and returns not is a kleptomaniac.” Ade acquired *Gulliver’s Travels, Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire, Popular History of the United States, Dickens’ Bleak House, Emerson’s essays,* and works of Shakespeare, Byron, Pope, Sir Walter Scott, Burns, and Thackeray. George read them all, too, even at times neglecting his assigned classroom work in math, zoology, and chemistry.

In his final Purdue year of 1886-1887, Ade led the Irvings and presided over Sigma Chi. He organized dances and picnics. He even took up with Lillian Howard, a blonde freshman from Lafayette. Nothing came of it, yet Ade’s biographer decades later would write, “there is reason to believe that Lillian Howard was the one girl with whom George Ade would ever be in love” (Kelly, *Ade*, 63).

George’s senior-year grades averaged eighty-nine—creditable for such a busy kid from a farm town. Purdue commencement on
June 9, 1887 honored Ade and seven other graduates. Each presented an “oration” or an abstract of a thesis. The others rendered far more technical presentations than George’s “The Future of Letters in the West.” In his effort, Ade predicted “the hub of the literary universe is about to shift from Cambridge, Massachusetts, to an indefinite region which includes Crawfordsville, Indianapolis, and Tippecanoe County, Indiana.” After all, Lew Wallace’s seven-year-old *Ben Hur* was becoming a classic, and other Indiana writers such as Edward Eggleston and Maurice Thompson had popular books to their credit. George also seemed to be thinking of future unknowns who would add to Indiana’s literary glory. Ade confessed to spending weeks on that speech “rubbing out short words and putting in longer ones” (Kelly, *Ade*, 64). And he remained unsure of what he had accomplished by finishing Purdue. In an interview in 1902, he said after growing up in Kentland, “I went to Purdue, from which I graduated in 1887, and then my troubles began.”

After his graduation, as Ade remembered it, he found work as a reporter for a short-lived Republican newspaper, the Lafayette *Morning News*. Ade said he was paid in stock and as little money as possible. In a letter half a century later, Ade expressed amusement and surprise that the inquiring writer had remembered his connection with the *Morning News* so many years before. Ade said the *News* was started so that there would be a Republican morning paper in Lafayette during the political campaign of 1888, “but it died before the campaign opened.”

Answering another letter: “I never was a regular [typesetter at the *Morning News*.] I did a little typesetting just for practice. My job in the printing office was to run the job press, operate the roller on the old Washington hand press, address and fold the single wrappers and deliver papers to the post office. I was a kind of a ‘devil’ around the shop but never became a regular. I did write a few items for publication” (Tobin 203-204).
Just months after Ade finished Purdue, the school first fielded a football team. But Ade, who would describe those years as “a prehistoric era of pompadours, polkas, tight trousers, mandolins and Sweet Caporal cigarettes,” came to love Purdue football so much that he “became a sophomore for forty years.” He wrote that Purdue’s first players were “tall, skinny boys who wore spectacles, and had the biceps of a sand hill crane.” Albert Berg, a deaf-mute from Lafayette who had learned football in the East, came on as coach—for a dollar a day. Ade wrote that Berg’s job was to “take charge of the halt, the lame, the blind, and the perniciously anemic to imbue them with stamina, courage and strategy. Any man who wished to play football could make the team by merely signing his name. [They] put down their names because they had read about Tom Brown at Rugby and wished to get a free ride to Indianapolis...Our athletes trained on pie and doughnuts” (Kelly, Ade, 68).

Ade called the Purdue team’s season-opening (and closing) forty-two-point loss to Butler “a low comedy reproduction of the Custer massacre at Little Big Horn.” But Berg, in a remembrance written in 1924, pictured the time more charitably:

It was a fine bunch of boys that I coached in ’87. On account of my inability to hear, my ability to talk only to a limited extent, and on account of [football] being practically new in this part of the country, my instruction was mainly by imitation by the boys of my own playing, and the way they caught on and improved upon it would have delighted and encouraged any coach. They were a willing and loyal lot, full of pep and college spirit, and the foundation, I am sure, was then and there laid for Purdue’s subsequent gridiron success. (Lafayette Journal and Courier, November 20, 1924)

J. B. Burris captained Berg’s team. Burris graduated from Purdue in 1888. He said he was chosen captain because, in the fall of 1887, he was the only man at Purdue who had ever seen a football game. He recalled:
Athletics at Purdue...came naturally to a bunch of old “dorm” hermits whose opportunity for exercise (except for the usual dorm escapades) was meager in the extreme. An occasional game of baseball in the spring during the middle of the 1880s played with some local nine was not an enthusiastic event. No means of recreation except short hikes up Happy Hollow, a row on the Wabash River or a cross-country foraging expedition were forthcoming.

In the fall of 1886 there came vague rumors that the game of football was being indulged in by three colleges of the state—Hanover, Butler and Wabash. Having a friend playing on the Wabash team [I] accepted his invitation and saw the game against Hanover at the old Athletic Park in Indianapolis.

During the fall a large round ball, similar to that [later] used in basketball had been kicked about the open space in front of the old [Purdue] dorm. No attempt was made at a game between teams.

Early in the fall of 1887 a few enthusiastic individuals called a meeting and an athletic organization was effected. At a subsequent meeting [I] suggested the colors old gold and black, borrowed from Princeton, and doubtless due to the fact that [I] was the only party present who had ever seen a game played, was chosen captain of the newly organized team.

Suits of bed ticking and brown canvas were made by a local tailor at a nominal cost, paid for from a fund mostly subscribed by occupants of the “dorm.” Goals were erected on the open campus in front of the dorm and a mute, one Albert Berg, living in Lafayette, was engaged as coach at a price of one dollar per lesson.
This fellow had learned the game in Washington where he had attended school. Fancy, if you will, a mute coaching a football team! Also [imagine] football togs without shields, balloon tires, pads or protection fore or aft!

A game was arranged with Butler and on the morning of Oct. 29, 1887, the [Purdue] team with about 50 supporters boarded a Big Four train for Indianapolis. President [James] Smart came to the station, asking that we play the best we could and act like gentlemen. If winners, he said, send a message and he would come [and meet our train] with a band on return.

Clint Hare, an old Yale player, had coached Butler. William P. Herod, a Harvard man, was referee. The score was 48 to 6 in Butler’s favor.

There followed an editorial from the November 1887 issue of The Purdue, the old college paper: “The reverse met with by the university football team in a recent intercollegiate contest should not in any way dampen the ardor of the athletic enthusiasts. While it is not to be denied that it was the worst kind of a defeat, when viewed in the light of existing circumstances it does not appear so bad.

“The team, as such, had practices for a week only, and that too when players were constantly being changed. The duties of the individual positions were not thoroughly understood and the men under limited amount of coaching did not fully realize the fine points of the game. The team certainly deserves the credit given them for the plucky manner in which they met such tremendous odds.

“This was their first game, and that too against the oldest team in the state. Everyone should feel satisfied that this much was
developed: That we have the material for a strong team, men that are willing and enthusiastic in doing all they can in making Purdue a record for western college athletics.”

The management of the Morning News, paying with job titles instead of money, at one point promoted George Ade to “assistant city editor.” However, he was still the only reporter, still chased the Lafayette fire engines, and detected an economic end approaching. “The funds had dribbled away,” Ade said. “The backers had fled, the editor had evaporated, the editorial writer had gone to Delphi to see his girl, the business manager was in retirement, the city editor had flown to Crawfordsville.”

Only George and the foreman of the composing room were left. He wrote, “We held a brief funeral service just at midnight, then locked the dear departed in the cold forms, pooled our finances and went to an all-night beanery” (Kelly, Ade, 67).

“After the News flickered I went over to the Call and worked for ‘Sep’ [editor Septimius] Vater for practically nothing [eight dollars] a week,” George continued. “I remember the Wise Saloon across from the Lahr House, even if I did not get over there very often. It was a tough dump” (Tobin 207-208). The Call, Ade said, “paid partly in meal tickets for a cheap restaurant that was a heavy advertiser.”

Vater wanted George to write as many local names as possible into his Call stories. Through the rival afternoon Courier, George encountered John T. McCutcheon’s brother George Barr McCutcheon. The latter worked under similar orders, from the Courier, that names make news. The two young drama fans found a common interest in a minstrel show comedian named Willis Sweatnam and his fictitious monologue characters. Before long, both the Call and Courier contained faked Ade and McCutcheon creations, borrowed from Sweatnam’s acts, such as:
• “The widow Truckmuck is entertaining her cousin from Peru.”

• “Lee Truckmuck returned from Chicago yesterday and reports a neat profit on his last shipment of yearlings.”

• “The younger son of the widow Truckmuck is recovering from the scarlet fever.”

“After a few months I went to work for a patent medicine concern,” Ade said. “The owner, Harry Kramer, was a prosperous native who had many irons in the fire. I sold a cure for the tobacco habit and did well.”

Ade roomed in the Stockton House at 634 South Street in Lafayette in his first post-college stop in life. Sisters of Holland Dutch descent—Gertrude and Lena Niemantsverdriet—ran the Stockton House. Ade continued seeing many shows, too, at the Grand Opera House barely a city block away.

Kramer owned a health resort where patrons took mud baths. He also ran a company that made and sold proprietary drugs. He offered Ade twelve dollars a week, later fifteen, to write ads, dictate letters, and handle mail as a “department manager.”

“We sold to druggists at a time when a drug store was a repository for patent medicines instead of a combination of soda fountain, restaurant, beauty parlor, novelty shop and radio concert,” Ade said. “The patent medicine business was not to be sneezed at when every prominent church worker and temperance advocate used about two large square-cornered full quart size bottles of ‘tonic’ every week. This useful remedy for whatever ailed you was compounded from No. 2 Pennsylvania rye whiskey,
syrup and a small percentage of puckery bitters. Whisky, syrup
and bitters—try to figure anything but a cocktail out of that! Yet no
one ever said that the Deacon was a rum-hound or ever accused
the druggist of being a saloon keeper” (Kelly, Ade, 69).

Another product was No-Tobac, Kramer’s cure for the tobacco
habit. Ade wrote a pamphlet containing testimonials about No-
Tobac and got John McCutcheon to draw a cover. The cover pic-
tured a Roman warrior sinking a sword into a part-serpent,
part-alligator monster labeled Nicotine. Ade went on smoking
Sweet Caporals while hyping No-Tobac and said that McCutcheon
inhaled Richmond Straight Cuts while drawing and making five
dollars for the effort. It is believed to be one of the first McCutch-
eon cartoons ever published.

By October 1889, McCutcheon had gone to Chicago for a job in
the Art Department of the News. Back in Lafayette, Ade needed
more things to write and more money for writing.

While visiting the Delta Delta Chapter fellows at Purdue, Ade
suggested that the Sigma Chis produce a souvenir book to mark
the University’s fifteenth commencement in June 1890. They could
sell advertising to pay for the publication. Ade persuaded Mc-
cutcheon to coax drawings from a couple of his artist friends in
Chicago. A Sigma Chi named Paul Anders took bows for being the
editor-in-chief of A Souvenir. However, according to McCutcheon,
Ade wholly directed and largely wrote the project. Ade is believed
to have composed the untitled ode to John Purdue, the University
founder, who had died in the late summer of 1876:

No gleaming shaft nor granite block,

Nor sculptured pile of cold, insensate stone,

No chiseled epitaph of empty praise,

Marks his last resting place.
Himself without a home, he reared a place
Where Science might abide and Learning dwell;
Where Art should flourish long, and hold her court,
And grant to every worshiper his meed.
He sleeps—and tow’ring here above his couch
The products of his genius and his toil
Speak louder far than wrought or figured stone
Of life well lived and labor nobly done.

Ade further contributed poems titled “Picnics,” “The Glorious Touchdown,” “The La Grippe,” and “The College Widow,” plus a comic piece of nonsensical advice he called “Some Easy Lessons” and stories titled “The Dorm” and “The Annuals.”

In “The College Widow,” as matters would unfold, the seven stanzas contained the plot of one of Ade’s most enduring literary works that became both a Broadway play and motion picture. The poem described the life of a college belle who, as her older admirers move on, accepts the attentions of younger ones:
(Stanza One)

When I was but a Freshman—and that was long ago—
I saw her first, but did not learn her name;
She was at a lecture, I believe, in the first or second row,
And the Junior with her seemed to be her flame.
He held her fan all evening and gazed into her eyes;
Thought I, “Now they’re engaged, or soon will be:’
But afterward they quarreled, as I learned with some surprise,
When the faculty conferred on him G. B.

(Stanza Three)

O, charming college widow, I never can forget
The night when you put on my college pin;
I pressed your hand and told you that the act you’d not regret
And you said you’d stick to us through thick and thin.

I remember still the picnics and that moonlight promenade,

Just the night before I paid for my degree,

When we interchanged such sacred vows, and declarations made,

That we’d love each other through eternity.

(Stanza Seven)

She looked a little older, but her laugh was just as gay;

Beside her was a gallant Sophomore,

Who held her parasol aloft and gushed the selfsame way

That I had doubtless done in days of yore.

I merely tipped my hat; I feared to introduce my wife,

For I knew that some remark might lightly fall,

Revealing to my better half a chapter of my life,
Which I’d rather she not suspect at all.

That spring George began receiving gushing letters about Chicago, not from any “charming college widow” at all, but from McCutcheon. The letters urged George to come. McCutcheon said his room had a double bed, so there was every reason for George to try working in the big town. In June 1890, when Kramer changed medicine company managers, George found himself out of work. So George informed McCutcheon by mail that he was now “at liberty” and would be willing to try Chicago and share that double bed.