Ross-Ade

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“Fables” and more

When George Ade first showed signs of embarking in literary work,” his pal McCutcheon wrote, “his father, a banker in Kentland, and his brothers, well-to-do landowners, predicted a future for him that would contain very little money. But when his ‘Fables in Slang’ were syndicated and the royalties began rolling in to his father’s bank, the home folks were amazed. His brothers began buying land for George until he owned two thousand acres in the rich heart of the Corn Belt” (McCutcheon, Drawn from Memory, 44).

Helping those royalties roll in were two publishing houses, the Stone Company in Chicago and the R. H. Russell Company in New York City.

Stone issued More Fables in October 1900—nineteen more, to be exact. In October 1901, Russell produced Forty Modern Fables. Russell then brought out The Girl Proposition on October 13, 1902. There were twenty-two Fables in this book, but Ade was on the brink of another windfall that kept royalties rolling in for ten more years.

He finished his first stage play—a light opera, The Sultan of Sulu—in the room he had been renting with McCutcheon. Ade tried out verses for more than fifty songs before he kept twenty-two for performance. By train on April 24, 1902, Ade brought the Chicago Studebaker Theater’s Sultan cast down to Lafayette to play it one night in the Grand Opera House. A railroad depot reception, testimonial dinner, and Purdue Band concert enriched Ade’s homecoming. The Sultan underwent the usual tweaking during an eleven-week run in Chicago. On December 29, 1902, it
opened in New York City at a theater on Thirtieth and Broadway. While he was in New York, Ade for the first and only time met his literary idol Mark Twain.

“[Twain] was greatly amused because a woman friend of his was trying to translate some of my ‘Fables’ into French,” Ade recalled. “He didn’t think she could do it. I told him that [a mutual friend] once gave me a sentence from Mark Twain I never encountered in his writings—Bacon would improve the flavor of an angel. I talked with Mark Twain only that once” (Tobin, 217).

The meeting resulted years later in Ade writing “One afternoon with Mark Twain:”

For a good many years I had been waiting and hoping to meet Mark Twain. I think I had read everything he ever wrote. With great admiration and respect I had witnessed his “come-back” in the early nineties during which he repaid a mountainous debt as a matter of honor, not of personal legal responsibility.

How unappreciative we often are, at the time, of the red-letter days in our lives!...What was in my mind at the time was the belief that he would live for many more years; and that, having met him on this occasion I would later visit him alone and at greater length...Beside his towering fame, my own stature was something like that of a child’s mud-pie man, placed alongside the statue of Rodin’s “Thinker.”

And thus it happened that I made no notes recording the details of the most momentous meeting of my life. I went; I saw and heard; I came away. The tragic events of the few remaining years of Mark Twain’s life [he died in 1910] made it impossible for me ever to talk with him again...

He stood alone on the porch waiting to greet. He wore a white or tan-colored suit, loose and comfortable looking. From the moment he took my hand in his firm clasp, he was the soul of kindli-
ness, cordiality and affability. I can recall only his eyes. I lack words to describe the calm, penetrating, unwavering grace he enveloped me with during the first few moments of our meeting. I was several inches taller than he, so that he must have looked upward into my eyes; yet I did not sense the difference in height. It seemed, indeed, as if he were looking downward on me...

He warned me that I was soon to be made the victim of a fantastic plan evolved by a woman of family acquaintance, to translate some of my “Fables in Slang” into French.

“She cannot possibly find any French equivalents for your specimens of American vernacular,” he said, “but she is determined to make the effort and I am waiting until it is done so that I can watch some Frenchman go crazy trying to read it.” (Lazarus, 199-200)

As newspapers across the nation printed series after series of Ade’s “Fables,” they went into more books until there were about a dozen collections, among them People You Know published by Russell on April 17, 1903. There were twenty-five Fables in that book.

On May 18, 1903, Russell published The Sultan of Sulu in a special book to celebrate the play’s two-hundredth performance in New York City in June.

There followed a series of short, juvenile novels written by Ade for what was called The Strenuous Lad’s Library series by Bandar Log Press. Seven such little volumes were advertised, but only three were ever published, and those in limited editions. The Press appears to have been Mexican, known also as “Progreso,” located in Phoenix in the Arizona Territory.

Bandar Log issued the first in about July 1903, under the title Handsome Cyril, or, The messenger boy with the warm feet. An artist
named Frank Holme made the book’s woodcut figures. This “novel” ran for sixteen pages. Subscribers could buy all seven in the projected series for five dollars. There were 674 copies made of the first one. The material all had appeared before in the Record and would appear again in a collection titled Bang! Bang!

The second in the Strenuous Lad’s Library series came out in October 1903. Its title was Clarence Allen, the Hypnotic Boy Journalist. “Progreso’s” hand press in Phoenix stamped out 374 copies. The third volume bore the title Rollo Johnson, the Boy Inventor, or, The Demon Bicycle and Its Daring Rider. This book contained twenty-four pages when issued in January 1904.

Eventually, Sultan of Sulu stage performance royalties enabled Ade to acquire even more acreage east of Brook, Indiana, eleven miles from his Kentland birthplace. On that land, reusing his old pen name, Ade began developing a “Hazelden Farm” home, golf course, pool, and country club for neighbors. Why Brook? McCutcheon ventured this guess:

A girl once remarked to him: “It is amazing how many bright men come from Indiana.” George is said have answered: “Yes, and the brighter they are, the quicker they come.”

That line is clever enough to have been delivered by him. But when reported in Indiana it created such a furor that, to prove that he never said it, he moved [from Chicago] back to Indiana and made his home on Hazelden Farm near Brook. The friendly house, the swimming pool, the golf course and small clubhouse soon became famous. (McCutcheon, Drawn from Memory, 44-45)

During 1902, Ade finished writing a play he titled Peggy from Paris. This story told of an Illinois girl who returned for an American concert—after studying singing in Paris—using the name “Mademoiselle Fleurette Caramelle.” There was a tryout for the
play in South Bend, Indiana, before *Peggy from Paris* opened in Chicago on January 26, 1903 and in New York City on September 10.

Shortly thereafter, Ade had another stage show prepared. He made *The County Chairman* a comedy of life and politics in a one-horse town of the 1880s. This play premiered in South Bend near the end of August 1903. Chicago audiences liked it so much that it succeeded *Peggy from Paris* in New York City.


Ade composed, but later cut out, a whimsical poem for use in Act II of a 1904 play he was writing that would be called *Sho-Gun*. The earliest printing of the poem was in the *Indianapolis Journal* on October 4, 1903. The title started as “A Bacteriological Love Story.” The memorable verses showed up again, this time as “The Microbe’s Serenade,” in May 1906, in the *Indianapolis Journal*. The *Journal* said that Ade had “passed it out to his fraternity brothers last night at the Country Club” during a Sigma Chi annual state banquet. A biographer said that Ade “liked this piece so much he recited it at banquets, even handed out copies” (Lazarus, 230).

A love-lorn microbe met by chance

At a swagger bacteroidal dance
A proud bacillian belle, and she

Was first of the animalculae,

Of organism saccharine,

She was the protoplasmic queen

The microscopical pride and pet

Of the biological smartest set;

And so this infinitesimal swain

Evolved a pleasing, low refrain

“Oh, lovely metamorphic germ!

What futile scientific term

Can well describe thy many charms?

Come to these embryonic arms!

Then hie away to my cellular home
And be my little diatome.”

His epithelium burned with love;

He swore by molecules above

She’d be his own gregarious mate

Or else he would disintegrate.

This amorous mite of a parasite

Pursued the germ both day and night,

And ‘neath her window often played

A Darwin-Huxley serenade—

He’d warble to her ev’ry day,

This rhizopodical roundelay:

“O, most primordial type of spore!

I never saw your like before,
And though a microbe has no heart

From you, sweet germ, I’ll never part;

We’ll sit beneath some fungus growth

Till dissolution claims us both.”

There was nothing whimsical about 1903 Purdue football, though. Oh, the team had been doing well enough, and the annual rivalry game against Indiana University was drawing big crowds. Years before, Purdue had won the first two games against “IU” by a combined score of 128 to nothing. Purdue won again six to nothing by forfeit in 1894, won twenty to six in 1897, and fourteen to nothing in 1898. Then fortunes changed. Indiana won seventeen to five in 1899, twenty-four to five in 1900, and eleven to six in 1901. Purdue won thirty-nine to nothing on Stuart Field in 1902.

In 1900, Dr. Winthrop E. Stone, in a report upon assuming the Purdue presidency, had commented with academic preciseness on this general success:

In 1893 a number of citizens of Lafayette offered a handsome silver cup by Tiffany to become the property of the college that for three successive years should be the [football] champion of Indiana. This cup was won by Purdue and is treasured among its athletic trophies. From 1891 to 1899 Purdue has been the acknowledged champion of the state in football and during a portion of this time was unbeaten by an opponent, including the largest institutions of the west.
This prestige was probably due to the fact that Purdue was one of the pioneers in the game, and advanced more rapidly in a knowledge of the game than did its opponents. Of recent years this difference has been more nearly equalized and the advantages accruing to institutions with large numbers of students has come more prominently into evidence.

Purdue had won four games and lost two going into the 1903 match against Indiana on October 31. There would be three more Purdue games following. The Purdue and IU teams would play this game for the first time in Washington Park, near Thirtieth and Keystone in northeast Indianapolis. Athletic scheduling and financing matters at Purdue now were in the hands of Harry G. “Skillet” Leslie. Leslie was a bright and popular senior student from Montmorenci, Indiana, who had moved to West Lafayette. Leslie’s junior class at Purdue had elected him their president. He had captained Purdue baseball and football teams in 1902, and pals chose him “student director” of a Purdue Athletic Association in 1903. He would play fullback for Purdue in the Indiana game and the remaining games that season.

On the day of the game, three Big Four Railroad special passenger trains left Lafayette carrying 964 passengers. Thirteen cars in the first train carried the football players, band, faculty, administrators, and fans. Rolling into northwest Indianapolis at twenty-five miles per hour, the first train abruptly smashed into seven heavily loaded coal cars mistakenly switched from a siding and standing on the main line. The thundering crash derailed the steam locomotive and tender full of coal, then crushed the first passenger car carrying mostly players, coaches, trainers, and a few high-roller businessmen who were team boosters. The screams and shrieks and shouts accompanied the impact that overturned the second car carrying the band and sent that car down an embankment while the third car rode up and over the first two. There followed a few seconds of shocked silence, then moans of agony and the flowing of blood. From the jolted safety of one of the rear cars, President Stone worked his way forward, stunned by the carnage.
Survivors from their rear seats and even some from the damaged forward cars joined good-hearted strangers who ran to the wreckage from nearby factories. They strained and lifted and struggled to find and recover the dead and injured. There were splintered bones. Blood dripped as from cracked water pipes. Smashed heads oozed blood diluted by what looked like yellow tapioca pudding. Sixteen aboard the train died at the scene and forty-some required hospital aid.

The Lafayette Courier for Saturday afternoon already had gone to press when the first telegraphed bulletin arrived. The paper did not print on Sundays. By Monday, November 2, the Courier at last printed, in alphabetical order, a “Complete List of Dead Compiled by Dr. Stone.”

C. Coats, football player from Berwin, Pennsylvania

G. A. Drollinger, player from Mill Creek, near Laporte, Indiana

C. E. Furr, left guard from Veedersburg, Indiana

C. G. Grube, substitute from Butler [DeKalb County, northeast of Auburn], Indiana

Jay Hamilton, player from Huntington, Indiana

W. D. Hamilton, center from Beardstown, Illinois
Newton R. Howard, president of American Steam Laundry Company, Lafayette, a Purdue Athletic Association booster.

William Mailey, player from New Richmond, Indiana

Patrick McClair, team trainer from Tippecanoe [Marshall County southwest of Plymouth], Indiana

R. J. Powell, left end from Corpus Christi, Texas

B. Price, player from Spencer, Indiana

E. C. Robertson, assistant coach from East Helena, Montana

W. L. Roush, player from Gas City, Indiana

G. L. Shaw, player from Indiana Harbor [Lake County], Indiana

S. B. Squibbs, player from Lawrenceburg, Indiana

In a “Revised List of the Injured,” the Courier alphabetized (Allen through Zimmerman) thirty-eight survivors’ names, hometowns, and their conditions. Among them:

A West Lafayette physician, Dr. A. W. Bitting, being treated in St. Vincent’s Hospital, Indianapolis for serious back and hip injuries and bruises.
The Purdue football coach Oliver F. Cutts, in St. Vincent’s Hospital with a non-serious ankle sprain.

The Athletics Association student director Harry Leslie, senior fullback from West Lafayette, in City Hospital, Indianapolis with serious leg and jaw injuries.

Rescuers had pulled Leslie from the steaming, bloody, shattered wreckage, identified him, counted him dead, and carried him to a makeshift morgue. There someone chanced to see his right arm move. For months Leslie recovered in City Hospital from a fractured leg, shattered jaw, and side and internal injuries. He walked with a limp for the rest of his busy and distinguished public life.

Purdue and Indiana officials cancelled the football game. The Courier listed the most critically injured survivors as of Monday:

H. O. Wright, of Pendleton, Indiana, in St. Vincent’s with a broken back, head cuts, and a fractured left leg.

S. V. B. “Sim” Miller, of Nineveh, Indiana, in City Hospital with both legs broken.

C. O. Tangeman of Fernbank, Ohio, delirious with head injuries that doctors feared could prove fatal.

T. Hendricks Johnston, of Evansville, Indiana, who “may die at any moment.” He had contracted pneumonia after suffering severe head and chest injuries.

Lou Smith, of Lafayette, in City Hospital with head and back injuries. The patient had a “large hole in the right side of his back,”
the paper said, “and the physicians suppose that the projectile, whatever it was, penetrated the abdominal cavity.”

The Monday *Courier* also described the grim scene at Purdue: “A half-masted flag, a dreary rain, a campus barren of students, a slow, mournful procession to the Fowler Hall chapel...[black] crepe evident everywhere and students stricken with heavy sorrow.

“Professor [Clarence A.] Waldo offered prayer at the close of the reading of the scripture by Professor [Emma] McRae in chapel, the ceremony beginning at 11 o’clock. The prayer touched the hearts of the assembled people, and tears coursed town the cheeks of students and professors alike.”

President Stone spoke “with faltering voice”:

We must care for the heartsick as well as the wounded, which is our first duty...The faculty thought that it was fitting first to seek strength from God; learn what is best to be done and take steps to do that work...Some think mostly of the dead but ever since the disaster there has come, through the great confusion, people earnest and eager to offer aid.

[Your surviving comrades] almost without exception are resting comfortably. Every hour there is new hope. All give promise of speedy recovery, but there are some exceptions...The best physicians, the best nurses are doing everything. There are four or five in serious condition.

The *Courier* reported that the catastrophe “has plunged [the entire state of Indiana] into deepest sorrow, and while the wound is more keenly felt in Lafayette and at Purdue, it is nevertheless felt all over the country, from which messages come pouring in filled with sympathy, devotion, anxiety and condolence.”

Sunday had been “a day of woe here,” the paper said, “and churches were filled with people who wanted to hear words of love and sympathy for the dead...and [the day] was one big ‘Memorial Day.’”
Stone said the Purdue registrar, Alfred M. Kenyon, would maintain a bulletin board in the main campus building for further news and funeral arrangements.

Stone set up a temporary office in the Denison Hotel in Indianapolis. From there, he directed messages, visitors, mail, or gifts to the recovering survivors. Stone said no memorial service would be held for at least another week, and he would form a committee of faculty and students to arrange one.

Professor Stanley Coulter read messages of condolence from all parts of the United States, among them were resolutions from Indiana University and Northwestern University. The Courier of November 3 editorialized:

Football at Purdue sounds like hollow mockery. It is certain that no interest can be taken in the game here this season, and it is doubtful if football will be a very great factor next year, when it is possible that the team will be reorganized.

The fund started by the late N. R. Howard for the benefit of the Athletic Association amounts to about two thousand dollars, and it will be paid over to the Association at once. The Athletic Association was never in need of money as it is today, and the merchants of the city who have contributed to the fund started by the man who was killed in the wreck will have the satisfaction of knowing that the money has gone to a good cause.

The Association had contracted to pay Cutts $1,500. McClaire and Robertson [also] were to have been paid. It cost the Association $600 to make the Indianapolis trip, outside of the unexpected expense incurred. The proceeds of the game at Indianapolis were to have gone toward erasing some of the obligations of the Association, but that and other big games of the season [against Notre Dame and two other foes] have been done away with, and there will be no further source of revenue.
The Association has been willing to refund money paid for tickets, but few have asked for it, and the in many instances debts have disappeared without being paid by Purdue. A transfer company in Indianapolis that was to furnish hacks to haul the players [from Union Station to Washington Park] presented a bill for $7. They were to have been paid $12 and $5 was paid some time ago. Without carrying the men to the game, they asked for the remainder.

The outlook for football at Purdue is very blue despite the fact that this had been looked upon as the great year.

By November 6, donations began arriving to raise fifty thousand dollars to build a Memorial Gymnasium. The gym would honor the train wreck dead. Word of the campaign spread in notices published in the Journal, the Courier, and the Evening Call. The stories stated that “no more fitting memorial could be raised and Dr. Stone has indorsed the movement.”

Purdue conducted a service of mourning in Eliza Fowler Hall at 11 a.m. on November 11. “The spirit of the weather was in close communion with the drooping spirits of those who attended,” the Courier reported. “Flapping in the furious wind were flags, half-masted and wet with dismal rain. There was no activity about the university; crepe hung from windows and over doors of neighboring houses.”

Purdue reserved a section in Fowler Hall for families and near relatives of the deceased. On the stage sat faculty, trustees, and representatives from other colleges and organizations. Flowers, palms, and crepe adorned the platform. A choir of Purdue students sang “Lead, Kindly Light.” Professor Waldo read scripture. Professor Coulter led a prayer, and President Stone spoke:
We are cast down with the weight of a new and strange burden. Our hearts are sore. Pleasant recollections of the past are blurred with a dark shadow. Hope for the future seems almost vain...

Purdue students are undergoing a training calculated to an unusual degree to impress upon you the power and unchangeability of the laws of nature. No other class of students is so well informed on this subject as you. In the natural course of events your life work will hereafter consist in directing and operating natural forces. In addition to this special training you are now brought face to face with an appalling instance of human disregard of these principles. It should be a lesson ineffaceably impressed upon your minds to be true to your responsibilities and to be honest in the performance of duty. (Lafayette Daily Courier, November 11, 1903)

The Marion County coroner in Indianapolis ruled on November 14 that a dispatcher in Kankakee, Illinois, had failed to notify the Indianapolis Big Four yardmaster that three “Purdue Special” trains would be arriving that morning. This was the “appalling instance of human disregard” to which President Stone referred. The coroner’s ruling sent a new wave of regret Lafayette’s way because the accused dispatcher was a native son. The Courier reported:

The coroner also found that Engineer Shoemaker and Conductor Johnson were running too fast within the city limits, but were justified in believing that they had the right-of-way...[The coroner] makes his verdict public without recommendation to either grand jury or prosecutor, washing his hands of the affair.

By September 1904, ten months after the train wreck, the Lafayette Journal reported that Harry Leslie had recovered enough to manage Purdue’s 1904 attempt to revive football. The paper called him “one of the most popular men at the university.” Purdue put
a team together. It defeated Indiana twenty-seven to nothing in Indianapolis. This concluded a purposely longer and softer Purdue football schedule. The team won nine times and lost three, but some of the wins came in games against “pick up” teams from the Purdue Alumni Association, from a certain North Division High School, from the Indiana Medical College, Beloit College, Earlham College, and Culver Military Academy.