

AMBROSE BIERCE



THE
Devil's
DICTIONARY

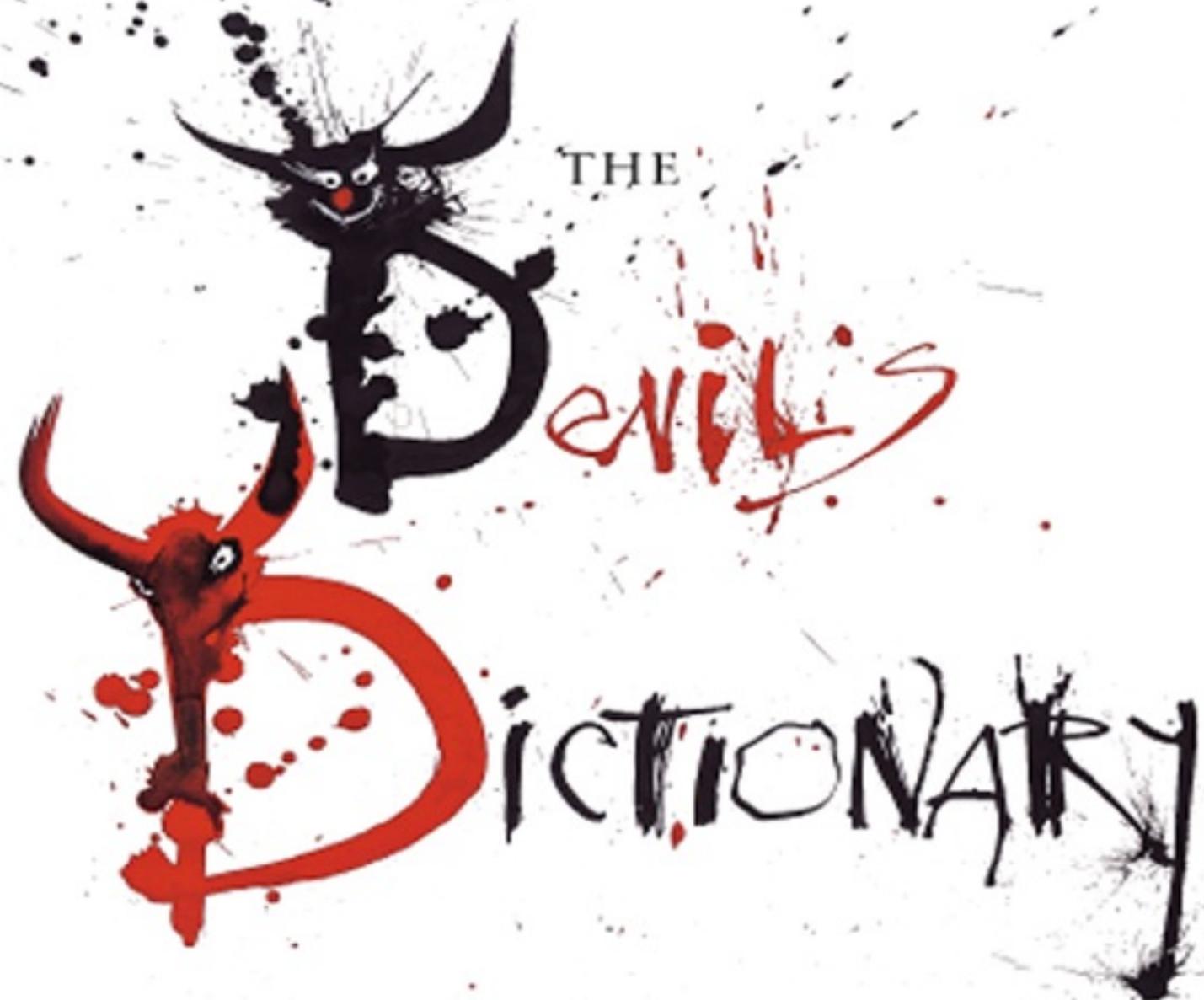
The title is rendered in a highly stylized, hand-drawn font. The word 'THE' is in a simple, black, sans-serif font. 'Devil's' is written in a red, cursive script. 'DICTIONARY' is in a black, jagged, hand-drawn font. The letter 'D' in 'Devil's' is a large, black, stylized letter with a devil's face and horns. The letter 'D' in 'DICTIONARY' is a large, red, stylized letter with a devil's face and horns. The background is white with black and red ink splatters.

'An American classic'
Sunday Telegraph

Illustrated by

RALPH STEADMAN

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Introduction by Angus Calder

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INTRODUCTION

Angus Calder

Ambrose Bierce (1842-1913?) despised realism. In his *Devil's Dictionary* he defines it as 'The art of depicting nature as it is seen by toads . . . or a story written by a measuring worm.' Assuming that his own life was a fiction, who would credit as 'realistic' either its beginning or its end – the bizarre circumstance of his naming, 'Ambrose Gwynett,' and the extraordinary fact that one of America's most celebrated literary men and public figures could disappear totally without trace on an actual or fabricated excursion into Mexico to view the battles of its revolution?

Rather more mundanely, there is a glaring contradiction between the personality projected in his journalistic writings – that of a cynical misanthrope and intractable misogynist, despairing of all politicians and their isms, venomously antipathetic to all religious belief and to clerics of every known or conceivable creed, and scathing in his invective against writers, famous and obscure, whom he considered bad – and the person exposed by attentive biographers. The atrabilious Bierce persona of the *Dictionary* was the mask of a much hurt man.

Though he quarrelled with many friends sooner or later, he always had ample to choose from. Perhaps because they thought they knew that his contempt for females was a pose, numerous women were amongst the young writers who flocked for advice to the Dr. Johnson of San Francisco, the literary arbiter of West Coast America, and to whom he was unflaggingly kind and supportive. 'Bitter Bierce', 'The Wickedest Man in San Francisco,' somehow survived, with a rich sunset glow of reputation, a long journalistic career in which he raked with wit and sarcasm which resounded across America and then over the Atlantic, fellow writers as famous as Henry James and Stephen Crane, all Freemasons, exorbitantly wealthy capitalists, several Presidents – and also obscure preachers, grafting local officials and feeble poetasters.

We cannot recapture whatever charm it was in Bierce made contemporaries tolerate, relish and even love the great 'curmudgeon.' Suffice it to point out, as brief accounts of his life tend not to do, that he was an extraordinarily handsome man. He was tall and stood very straight, fit-seeming, though he had chronic asthma. His fair hair flourished, his moustache was magnificent. His eyes were clear blue and his complexion fresh and rosy despite his habitual excesses with strong drink. He dressed very stylishly indeed and was obsessively committed to personal hygiene, perhaps because he had spent the formative years of his life in the stench and filth of one of the nastiest conflicts in human history.

He was born on 24 June 1842, in Meigs County, Ohio. He was the tenth child of Laura and Marcus '*Aurelius*' Bierce. Father, an indigent farmer and devout Congregationalist puritan, descended, like Mother, from seventeenth-century settlers in New England, decided that each child's name should begin with A – Abigail, Amelia, Ann, Addison, Aurelius, Augustus, Almeda, Andrew, Albert – then Ambrose. But how had Marcus come by the melodramatic play by the English writer Jerrold – *Ambrose Gwynett; or A Seaside Story* (1828), which gave him a G to go with the infant's A?

Further As followed – Arthur who died in 1846 aged nine months, then twin girls, Adelia and Aurelia, both dead within two years. Understanding of Ambrose surely has to begin with the fact that as his own understanding dawned, his mother was preoccupied firstly with caring for infant Arthur secondly with mourning successive losses. Woman did not give Boy the love he needed.

Rejecting Parents and Family, he took to books. Marcus was said to have the largest library in Kosciusko County, Indiana, where the family moved in 1846. Here Boy browsed.

Ambrose was a loner, unhappy both at home and school. When he turned fifteen, he quit the homestead for good, at first working as a printer's 'devil' on the Abolitionist newspaper recently founded in the nearby town of Warsaw. Thence he gravitated to Akron, Ohio, where Marcus's very different younger brother Lucius was the most prominent local citizen – lawyer, published author, four times mayor, and military legend. In 1838, Canada had seethed with rebellion against British rule. 'General' Bierce had led a force of 500 volunteers across Lake Erie to stir things up. Now he was a fierce Abolitionist, who provided arms and ammunition for John Brown when the latter set off on his bloody sortie into the proslavery South.

Lucius decided that Ambrose should be a soldier. He sent him, aged seventeen, to the celebrated Kentucky Military Institute. Ambrose dropped out after only one year, but acquired a military bearing and skills in design and cartography which quite soon became very useful indeed. For nine months, Ambrose drifted through menial jobs in Warsaw. Then in the spring of 1861, Civil War erupted. Bierce was one of the first to enlist in Lincoln's army.

With the Ninth Indiana Volunteer Infantry Regiment, Bierce entered diurnal trauma. Twenty thousand British soldiers had died in the recent Crimean War, only 3,000 directly in combat. In the appalling Battle of Shiloh in April 1862, in which Bierce took part, there were 23,741 casualties. All his service was in the South. For a son of the flat Midwest, the mountainous terrain was breathtaking. Its beauty, with agonizing irony, was backdrop to scenes of futile heroism, nightmare butchery. Bierce saw hogs feeding on the corpses of dead soldiers, brains oozing out of shattered skulls. In a sense he had a 'good war'. His extreme bravery attracted attention early on, when he rescued a wounded comrade under Confederate fire. His Kentucky Institute year further marked him for promotion. In February 1862, already a sergeant, he was reassigned to General William B. Hazen's brigade in Buell's Army of the Ohio, and named topographical officer, surveying terrain. In a year, he rose to first lieutenant. By November 1864 he was brevet captain. Close to Staff, he observed with disgust the behavior of generals, some silly, others callous. His hero was Hazen, who suffered no folly gladly, whether in infantrymen or senior commanders.

The future author of *The Devil's Dictionary* had inherited from his Puritan forebears a very strict conscience. Thus he was appalled by what he saw as a Federal treasury agent in Selma, Alabama after his demobilization. Carpetbaggers had moved in to loot the South. Bierce's job was to find and impound cotton deemed to belong to the US government. This was a commodity in immense demand, as important in its way as oil today. Fellow agents were in cahoots with conscienceless businessmen and outright pirates and smugglers. Bierce's stubborn probity put his life at risk. By now he had seen through the bombastic idealism of Uncle Lucius. What had the war really been about? From the careerism of soldiers to the cupidity of public servants, the war and its aftermath had helped provide Bierce, an affronted moralist, with the cynical view of human nature found in *The Devil's Dictionary*.

Hazen rescued him with a call to join him in an inspection tour of forts in the newly created Mountain District in the West. Launched in July 1866, this was a risky but exhilarating jaunt, through Indian country where buffalo still roamed. Bierce arrived in San Francisco at the end of the expedition expecting to receive word that he had been commissioned as a captain in the US Army. The letter he now opened offered him the rank of second lieutenant. He was furious and decided to resign. So he found himself jobless in a booming city created within the last two

decades by the famous Gold Rush. He would stay there, mostly, for over thirty years.

At first he was employed as a watchman in the US Branch Mint, while he labored on his self-education. He read the whole of Edward Gibbon's *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, and this was crucial to the emergence of Bitter Bierce from the chrysalis of a wannabe peacetime soldier. Here Bierce read of a mighty republic fallen into chaos and doomed to erratic Caesarism of virtuous rulers succeeded by vicious tyrants. Already alienated from his parents' chilly piety and disgusted by the revivalist meetings of rustic evangelists, he would find in Gibbon's ironic explorations of superstition, hypocrisy and corruption in the early Christian Church an intellectual dimension for his intestinal reactions. Not only the views but echoes of the style of the great master pervade Bierce's *Devil's Dictionary*, whenever it ventures into orotund Latinity.

San Francisco was just the place to start as a writer. A population of around one hundred thousand supported towards ninety newspapers and journals of various kinds. Two cardinal pioneers of what had been lacking – a distinctively 'American' literature – were stars in the city's eccentric, self-made firmament: Bret Harte and Mark Twain. Bierce's first publication, in the *Californian*, was a poem. He would write verse for the rest of his career, some of it plangent, more of it satirical, all of it technically sound, and he would always believe that poetry was the highest form of literature. But around this time he decided, with sadness, that he would never be up with the best 'It was the bitterest moment of my life' (O'Connor, 265). He began to publish articles here and there. In the summer of 1868 he joined the staff of the *News Letter*, and by December he was editing that paper. His predecessor, one Watkins, before he left for New York, kindly introduced Bierce to the writings of Swift and Voltaire. From the mad Dean he would have learnt how far savage indignation might proceed in the direction of grimly hilarious bad taste. From the Frenchman he must have imbibed a method of irony, laconic and perky, at a polar extreme from Gibbon's. On the same page of Bierce's *Dictionary*, the somewhat Swift-like suggestion that **Lap** is 'chiefly useful in rural festivities to support plates of cold chicken and the heads of adult males' is followed by the Voltairean **Lawyer** . . . 'One skilled in circumvention of the law.'

The proprietor of the *News Letter*, an Englishman, Frederick Marriott, had made it San Francisco's most profitable advertising organ. He was perfectly happy that Bierce, writing as 'Town Crier,' should increase his circulation by a wholesale onslaught on the city's clergy. Outraged responses poured in. Bierce denounced crimes by Christians against the industrious Chinese community, and commented on murders and suicides. Murder most foul is still a staple circulation-booster. In a time and place where much in the papers was combative and abusive the whole of San Francisco reacted with shock or glee to Town Crier's exceptional, Swiftian, absence of inhibition.

The rising star found a desirable mate in Mollie Day, daughter of a successful miner. Bierce was already attracting attention in London, still the literary capital of Englishspeakers. Old man Day was happy to send the young couple to England, and in 1872, Bierce sailed eastward-ho.

Other Californian luminaries obeyed the same magnet. Bret Harte would actually settle in England. Mark Twain showed up, as did Joaquin Miller, the self-styled cowboy 'Poet of the Sierras.' But Bierce preferred the tavern company of a group of well-known English fiction writers and journalists, at which W. S. Gilbert, Sullivan's librettist, sometimes appeared. Bierce found publishers for three collections of prose pieces. His pseudonym, 'Dod Grile', an anagram for 'God Riled,' did not become a household name, and Bierce struggled somewhat to support his wife and two infant sons. But he enjoyed England – indeed, became an out-and-out Anglophile –

and was not pleased when Mollie, who had retreated, homesick, to San Francisco, announced that she was pregnant with a third child. By October 1875, Bierce was with his family in California, now in economic depression, so that it was many months before he could find a new writing job, contributing a column called 'The Prattler' to the *Argonaut*, 'Town Crier' under a new name.

In 1880 he suddenly skipped away from journalism to go as general manager of a mining company to the Black Hills of Dakota. This was the West at its Wildest and Bierce prudently hired the fastest surviving gun in the region as his company's dedicated heavy, noting him in the payrolls as 'Boone May, murderer.' There was gold in them thar hills, but not where Bierce's company could get it, and through no fault of his own – he was perennially efficient in whatever post he held – the enterprise collapsed within months. But he resumed his 'Prattle' column for yet another San Francisco journal, *Wasp*, which hired him as editor in January 1881. It was now that he commenced, beginning perversely with P, a series of definitions for his readers as particles of what he called 'The Devil's Dictionary.' It was a popular feature, and eighty-eight installments of fifteen to twenty words each appeared over five years.

The great watershed in Bierce's literary life occurred in 1887. William Randolph Hearst, Harvard-educated son of a filthy-rich self-made Senator, had perceived that the future of the newspaper press lay in shameless 'yellow' sensationalism. He grabbed Bierce to write a column and editorials for his San Francisco *Examiner*. That the man could be guaranteed to be controversial was enough – Hearst did not mind if Bierce uttered opinions contrary to his own. Furthermore, the *Examiner* provided Bierce with an outlet for the Civil War stories which would gain him recognition as a major American creative writer.

The short story was still in its adolescence as a literary genre. What Bierce brought to the form was a combination of careful detail with grotesque and extraordinary incidents 'beyond belief.' He has been seen as a precursor of the 'magical realism' of the later twentieth century. Yet he would have regarded himself as harking back to Walter Scott, the great 'Romancer.' See his *Dictionary*, under **Novel**: '. . . To the romance the novel is what photography is to a painting. An acute editor of Bierce's stories perceives 'continuity' between those about the Civil War and his 'tall tales' and tales of the supernatural set in civilian life (Quirk, xxiv). But the latter catered for existing public taste. There had been nothing in English like the Civil War stories, which retain their power to shock after all the remarkable writing about war seen since 1914. Even Robert Graves, say, or Vasily Grossman seem to be holding something back from us, in charity, when compared to Bierce's unsparing 'Chickamauga.'

Bierce had been serving with Hazen's brigade in Georgia when the Battle of Chickamauga had erupted in September 1863. It was 'the bloodiest two-day encounter of the entire war,' from which the Northern Army retreated leaving some 16,000 dead and wounded behind them (Morris, 56-65). As old soldiers do, Bierce had choked back his most horrific memories, literally unspeakable, for decades. His art at last gave Chickamauga stylized, not 'photographic', shape by seeing its aftermath from the point of view of a deaf-mute little boy.

Tales of Soldiers and Civilians, his first book of fiction, appeared in 1891. Bierce's rush of 'serious' creativity coincided with personal calamity. He was outraged to discover a love letter written to Mollie by a Danish visitor to California. Perhaps, for the vocal decrider of marriage, it was pretext, not just cause, of his breaking from her in 1888, but he would tell their daughter years later that Mollie had been the love of his life. Next year, their son Day, aged seventeen, a budding journalist, killed himself after shooting his best friend over a girl.

Bierce wrote bitterly on. Affable, and generous with pay though Hearst was, Bierce perceived

and mistrusted his political agenda. (His populist newspapers were intended to help Hearst become President.) But his employer's cause was his own in 1896 when Hearst sent him to Washington to campaign against Collis P. Huntington.

Bierce loathed Huntington, veteran survivor of a generation of unbridled post-Civil War capitalists. The Lincoln administration had loaned money to his Southern Pacific railroad company. No interest had been paid, and now Huntington had sponsored a bill in Congress proposing a seventy-five year postponement of the debt. For months, Bierce filed devastating copy to Hearst's San Francisco and New York newspapers. One day, on the steps of the Capitol, Huntington asked Bierce to name his price. "My price," said Bierce, in a quote that would make newspaper headlines across the country, "is seventy-five million dollars. If, when you are ready to pay, I happen to be out of town, you may hand it over to my friend, the Treasurer of the United States" (Morris, 226). Huntington was duly thwarted in Congress.

In December 1899, Bierce returned to live in Washington, permanently, still hired to write for Hearst. He was sadly on hand when his second son Leigh, also a journalist, died of pneumonia in New York early in 1901. Mollie Bierce died four years later, shortly after filing for divorce at last. Meanwhile, from 1904 Bierce produced for Hearst twenty four more installments of his dictionary. *The Cynic's Word Book* appeared in 1906 – his publishers, Doubleday, were squeamish as to title. This was a collected set of *Devil's Dictionary* definitions, but only from A to L. The entire alphabet was published in 1911, under the correct title, in Volume 7 of an ill-advised twelve volume *Collected Works* (1909-12). The *Dictionary* gathered resonance as the century wore on. It anticipated a range of effects, from the misogynist wit of *New Yorker* cartoons and the cracks of Groucho Marx to the savage satirical styles of Georg Grosz, Steve Bell and Ralph Steadman, who aptly illustrates this volume.

Collection of works suggests that their author may sense that no more of importance will follow. Bierce may have felt written, talked and drunken out. By the autumn of 1913, he was talking about going to Mexico to witness the revolution in progress there, as if it might be form of euthanasia. (To fight for Pancho Villa's rebels? To be killed as a bystander by a stray shot?) Yet he also put it to people simply that war retained its fascination for him. (So new 'works' might result?) We know that in October he toured his old Civil War battlegrounds, including Chickamauga, and that, arriving in Texas, he sent letters thence. Whether the letter received by his secretary/ companion Carrie Christianson as from Chihuahua, Mexico, written December 26, was actually posted there cannot be confirmed. It was the last trace of Bierce. What is certain is that none of the numerous US journalists covering Villa's insurgence spotted that *doyen* of their craft, and that research into Bierce's disappearance launched by the US Government yielded no results whatsoever. There is likewise not a scrap of evidence to support the theory that Bierce actually headed north to Grand Canyon, found a remote spot, and shot himself.

Ambrose Bierce, *The Devil's Dictionary*, ed. Ernest Jerome Hopkins, Gollancz, London, 1967; Ambrose Bierce, *The Devil's Dictionary*, introduction by Roy Morris Jr., Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1999; Ambrose Bierce, *Tales of Soldiers and Civilians and Other Stories*, ed. Tom Quirk, Penguin, New York, London, 2000; Roy Morris Jr., *Ambrose Bierce: Alone in Bad Company*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1995; Richard O'Connor, *Ambrose Bierce: A Biography*, Gollancz, London, 1968.

PUBLISHER'S NOTE

The text of this edition has been abridged from that published in Volume 7 (1911) of Ambrose Bierce: *Collected Works* (1909-12).



Abasement, *n.* A decent and customary mental attitude in the presence of wealth or power. Peculiarly appropriate in an employee when addressing an employer.

Abatis, *n.* Rubbish in front of a fort, to prevent the rubbish outside from molesting the rubbish inside.

Abdication, *n.* An act whereby a sovereign attests his sense of the high temperature of the throne.

Abdomen, *n.* The temple of the god Stomach, in whose worship, with sacrificial rights, all true men engage. From women this ancient faith commands but a stammering assent. They sometimes minister at the altar in a halfhearted and ineffective way, but true reverence for the one deity that men really adore they know not. If woman had a free hand in the world's marketing the race would become graminivorous.

Ability, *n.* The natural equipment to accomplish some small part of the meaner ambitions distinguishing able men from dead ones. In the last analysis ability is commonly found to consist mainly in a high degree of solemnity. Perhaps, however, this impressive quality is rightly appraised; it is no easy task to be solemn.

Abnormal, *adj.* Not conforming to standard. In matters of thought and conduct, to be independent is to be abnormal, to be abnormal is to be detested. Wherefore the lexicographer adviseth a striving toward a straiter resemblance to the Average Man than he hath to himself. Whoso attaineth thereto shall have peace, the prospect of death and the hope of Hell.

Aborigines, *n.* Persons of little worth found cumbering the soil of a newly discovered country. They soon cease to cumber; they fertilize.

Abrupt, *adj.* Sudden, without ceremony, like the arrival of a cannonshot and the departure of the soldier whose interests are most affected by it. Dr Samuel Johnson beautifully said of another author's ideas that they were 'concatenated without abruption.'

Abscond, *v.i.* To 'move in a mysterious way,' commonly with the property of another.

Absentee, *n.* A person with an income who has had the forethought to remove himself from the sphere of exaction.



Absolute, *adj.* Independent, irresponsible. An absolute monarchy is one in which the sovereign does as he pleases so long as he pleases the assassins. Not many absolute monarchies are left, most of them having been replaced by limited monarchies, where the sovereign's power for evil (and for good) is greatly curtailed, and by republics, which are governed by chance.

Abstainer, *n.* A weak person who yields to the temptation of denying himself a pleasure. A total abstainer is one who abstains from everything but abstention, and especially from inactivity in the affairs of others.

Absurdity, *n.* A statement of belief manifestly inconsistent with one's own opinion.

Academe, *n.* An ancient school where morality and philosophy were taught.

Academy, *n.* (from academe). A modern school where football is taught.

Accident, *n.* An inevitable occurrence due to the action of immutable natural laws.

Accomplice, *n.* One associated with another in a crime, having guilty knowledge and complicity as an attorney who defends a criminal, knowing him guilty. This view of the attorney's position in the matter has not hitherto commanded the assent of attorneys, no one having offered them a fee for assenting.

Accord, *n.* Harmony.

Accordion, *n.* An instrument in harmony with the sentiments of an assassin.

Accountability, *n.* The mother of caution.

Accuse, *v.t.* To affirm another's guilt or unworth; most commonly as a justification of ourselves for having wronged him.

Achievement, *n.* The death of endeavor and the birth of disgust.

Acknowledge, *v.t.* To confess. Acknowledgment of one another's faults is the highest duty imposed by our love of truth.

Acquaintance, *n.* A person whom we know well enough to borrow from, but not well enough to lend to. A degree of friendship called slight when its object is poor or obscure, and intimate when he is rich or famous.

Actually, *adv.* Perhaps; possibly.

Adage, *n.* Boned wisdom for weak teeth.

Adamant, *n.* A mineral frequently found beneath a corset. Soluble in solicitate of gold.

Adder, *n.* A species of snake. So called from its habit of adding funeral outlays to the other expenses of living.

Adherent, *n.* A follower who has not yet obtained all that he expects to get.

Administration, *n.* An ingenious abstraction in politics, designed to receive the kicks and cuffs due to the premier or president.

Admiral, *n.* That part of a warship which does the talking while the figurehead does the thinking.

Admiration, *n.* Our polite recognition of another's resemblance to ourselves.

Admonition, *n.* Gentle reproof, as with a meat-axe. Friendly warning.

Adore, *v.t.* To venerate expectantly.

Advice, *n.* The smallest current coin.

Affianced, *pp.* Fitted with an ankle-ring for the ball-and-chain.

Affliction, *n.* An acclimatizing process preparing the soul for another and bitter world.

Age, *n.* That period of life in which we compound for the vices that we still cherish by reviling those that we have no longer the enterprise to commit.

Agitator, *n.* A statesman who shakes the fruit trees of his neighbors – to dislodge the worms.

Aim, *n.* The task we set our wishes to.

Air, *n.* A nutritious substance supplied by a bountiful Providence for the fattening of the poor.

Alderman, *n.* An ingenious criminal who covers his secret thieving with a pretence of open marauding.

Alien, *n.* An American sovereign in his probationary state.

Allah, *n.* The Mahometan Supreme Being, as distinguished from the Christian, Jewish, and so forth.

Alliance, *n.* In international politics, the union of two thieves who have their hands so deeply inserted in each other's pocket that they cannot separately plunder a third.

Alligator, *n.* The crocodile of America, superior in every detail to the crocodile of the effete monarchies of the Old World.

Alone, *adj.* In bad company.

Ambidextrous, *adj.* Able to pick with equal skill a right-hand pocket or a left.

Ambition, *n.* An overmastering desire to be vilified by enemies while living and made ridiculous by friends when dead.

Amnesty, *n.* The state's magnanimity to those offenders whom it would be too expensive to punish.

Anoint, *v.t.* To grease a king or other great functionary already sufficiently slippery.

Antipathy, *n.* The sentiment inspired by one's friend's friend.

Aphorism, *n.* Predigested wisdom.

Apologize, *v.i.* To lay the foundation for a future offence.

Apostate, *n.* A leech who, having penetrated the shell of a turtle only to find that the creature has long been dead, deems it expedient to form a new attachment to a fresh turtle.

Appeal, *v.t.* In law, to put the dice into the box for another throw.

Appetite, *n.* An instinct thoughtfully implanted by Providence as a solution to the labor question.

Applause, *n.* The echo of a platitude.

Archbishop, *n.* An ecclesiastical dignitary one point holier than a bishop.

Architect, *n.* One who drafts a plan of your house, and plans a draft of your money.

Ardor, *n.* The quality that distinguishes love without knowledge.

Arena, *n.* In politics, an imaginary rat-pit in which the statesman wrestles with his record.

Aristocracy, *n.* Government by the best men. (In this sense the word is obsolete; so is that kind of government.) Fellows that wear downy hats and clean shirts – guilty of education and suspected of bank accounts.

Armor, *n.* The kind of clothing worn by a man whose tailor is a blacksmith.

Arrayed, *pp.* Drawn up and given an orderly disposition, as a rioter hanged to a lamp-post.

Arrest, *v.t.* Formally to detain one accused of unusualness.

Artlessness, *n.* A certain engaging quality to which women attain by long study and severe practice upon the admiring male, who is pleased to fancy it resembles the candid simplicity of his young.

Asperse, *v.t.* Maliciously to ascribe to another vicious actions which one has not had the temptation and opportunity to commit.

Auctioneer, *n.* The man who proclaims with a hammer that he has picked a pocket with his tongue.



Babe or **Baby**, *n.* A misshapen creature of no particular age, sex, or condition, chiefly remarkable for the violence of the sympathies and antipathies it excites in others, itself without sentiment or emotion.

Bacchus, *n.* A convenient deity invented by the ancients as an excuse for getting drunk.

Back, *n.* That part of your friend which it is your privilege to contemplate in your adversity.

Backbite, *v.t.* To speak of a man as you find him when he can't find you.

Bait, *n.* A preparation that renders the hook more palatable. The best kind is beauty.

Baptism, *n.* A sacred rite of such efficacy that he who finds himself in heaven without having undergone it will be unhappy forever. It is performed with water in two ways – by immersion, plunging, and by aspersion, or sprinkling.

Barometer, *n.* An ingenious instrument which indicates what kind of weather we are having.

Barrack, *n.* A house in which soldiers enjoy a portion of that of which it is their business to deprive others.

Bath, *n.* A kind of mystic ceremony substituted for religious worship, with what spiritual efficacy has not been determined.

Battle, *n.* A method of untying with the teeth a political knot that would not yield to the tongue.

Beard, *n.* The hair that is commonly cut off by those who justly execrate the absurd Chinese custom of shaving the head.

Beauty, *n.* The power by which a woman charms a lover and terrifies a husband.

Befriend, *v.t.* To make an ingrate.

Beg, *v.* To ask for something with an earnestness proportioned to the belief that it will not be given.

Beggar, *n.* One who has relied on the assistance of his friends.

Behavior, *n.* Conduct, as determined, not by principle, but by breeding.

Belladonna, *n.* In Italian a beautiful lady; in English a deadly poison. A striking example of the essential identity of the two tongues.

Benefactor, *n.* One who makes heavy purchases of ingratitude, without, however, materially affecting the price, which is still within the means of all.

Bigamy, *n.* A mistake in taste for which the wisdom of the future will adjudge a punishment called trigamy.

Bigot, *n.* One who is obstinately and zealously attached to an opinion that you do not entertain.

Billingsgate, *n.* The invective of an opponent.

Birth, *n.* The first and direst of all disasters.

Blackguard, *n.* A man whose qualities, prepared for display like a box of berries in a market – the fine ones on top – have been opened on the wrong side. An inverted gentleman.

Blank-verse, *n.* Unrhymed iambic pentameters – the most difficult kind of English verse to write acceptably; a kind, therefore, much affected by those who cannot acceptably write any kind.

Body-snatcher, *n.* A robber of grave-worms. One who supplies the young physicians with that with which the old physicians have supplied the undertaker. The hyena.



Bondsman, *n.* A fool who, having property of his own, undertakes to become responsible for that entrusted by another to a third.

Bore, *n.* A person who talks when you wish him to listen.

Botany, *n.* The science of vegetables – those that are not good to eat, as well as those that are. It deals largely with their flowers, which are commonly badly designed, inartistic in color, and ill-smelling.

Boundary, *n.* In political geography, an imaginary line between two nations, separating the imaginary rights of one from the imaginary rights of the other.

Bounty, *n.* The liberality of one who has much, in permitting one who has nothing to get all that he can.

Brain, *n.* An apparatus with which we think that we think.

Brandy, *n.* A cordial composed of one part thunder-and-lightning, one part remorse, two parts bloody murder, one part death-hell-and-the-grave and four parts clarified Satan. Dose, a headful all the time. Brandy is said by Dr Johnson to be the drink of heroes. Only a hero will venture to drink it.

Bride, *n.* A woman with a fine prospect of happiness behind her.

Brute, n. See HUSBAND.



Cabbage, n. A familiar kitchen-garden vegetable about as large and wise as a man's head.

The cabbage is so called from Cabagius, a prince who on ascending the throne issued a decree appointing a High Council of Empire consisting of the members of his predecessor's Ministry and the cabbages in the royal garden. When any of his Majesty's measures of state policy miscarried conspicuously it was gravely announced that several members of the High Council had been beheaded, and his murmuring subjects were appeased.

Calamity, n. A more than commonly plain and unmistakable reminder that the affairs of this life are not of our own ordering. Calamities are of two kinds: misfortune to ourselves, and good fortune to others.

Callous, adj. Gifted with great fortitude to bear the evils afflicting another.

Cannibal, n. A gastronome of the old school who preserves the simple tastes and adheres to the natural diet of the pre-pork period.

Cannon, n. An instrument employed in the rectification of national boundaries.

Capital, n. The seat of misgovernment.

Carnivorous, adj. Addicted to the cruelty of devouring the timorous vegetarian, his heirs and assigns.

Cartesian, adj. Relating to Descartes, a famous philosopher, author of the celebrated dictum, *Cogito ergo sum* – whereby he was pleased to suppose he demonstrated the reality of human existence. The dictum might be improved, however, thus: *Cogito cogito ergo cogito sum* – 'I think that I think, therefore I think that I am'; as close an approach to certainty as any philosopher has yet made.

Cat, n. A soft, indestructible automaton provided by nature to be kicked when things go wrong in the domestic circle.

Caviler, n. A critic of our own work.

Cemetery, n. An isolated suburban spot where mourners match lies, poets write at a target and stone-cutters spell for a wager.

Centaur, n. One of a race of persons who lived before the division of labor had been carried to such a pitch of differentiation, and who followed the primitive economic maxim, 'Every man his own horse.' The best of the lot was Chiron, who to the wisdom and virtues of the horse added the fleetness of man.

Cerberus, n. The watch-dog of Hades, whose duty it was to guard the entrance – against whom

or what does not clearly appear; everybody, sooner or later, had to go there, and nobody wanted to carry off the entrance.

Childhood, *n.* The period of human life intermediate between the idiocy of infancy and the folly of youth – two removes from the sin of manhood and three from the remorse of age.

Christian, *n.* One who believes that the New Testament is a divinely inspired book admirably suited to the spiritual needs of his neighbor. One who follows the teachings of Christ in so far as they are not inconsistent with a life of sin.

Circus, *n.* A place where horses, ponies and elephants are permitted to see men, women and children acting the fool.

Clairvoyant, *n.* A person, commonly a woman, who has the power of seeing that which is invisible to her patron – namely, that he is a blockhead.

Clarionet, *n.* An instrument of torture operated by a person with cotton in his ears. There are two instruments that are worse than a clarionet – two clarionets.

Clergyman, *n.* A man who undertakes the management of our spiritual affairs as a method of bettering his temporal ones.

Clock, *n.* A machine of great moral value to man, allaying his concern for the future by reminding him what a lot of time remains to him.

Close-fisted, *adj.* Unduly desirous of keeping that which many meritorious persons wish to obtain.

Comfort, *n.* A state of mind produced by contemplation of a neighbor's uneasiness.

Commendation, *n.* The tribute that we pay to achievements that resemble, but do not equal, our own.

Commerce, *n.* A kind of transaction in which A plunders from B the goods of C, and for compensation B picks the pocket of D of money belonging to E.

Commonwealth, *n.* An administrative entity operated by an incalculable multitude of political parasites, logically active but fortuitously efficient.

Compromise, *n.* Such an adjustment of conflicting interests as gives each adversary the satisfaction of thinking he has got what he ought not to have, and is deprived of nothing except what was justly his due.

Compulsion, *n.* The eloquence of power.

Condole, *v.i.* To show that bereavement is a smaller evil than sympathy.

Confidant, **Confidante**, *n.* One entrusted by A with the secrets of B, confided by *him* to C.

Congratulation, *n.* The civility of envy.

Congress, *n.* A body of men who meet to repeal laws.

Connoisseur, *n.* A specialist who knows everything about something and nothing about anything.

else.

Conservative, *n.* A statesman who is enamored of existing evils, as distinguished from the Liberal, who wishes to replace them with others.

Consolation, *n.* The knowledge that a better man is more unfortunate than yourself.

Consul, *n.* In American politics, a person who having failed to secure an office from the people is given one by the Administration on condition that he leave the country.

Consult, *v.t.* To seek another's approval of a course already decided on.

Contempt, *n.* The feeling of a prudent man for an enemy who is too formidable safely to be opposed.

Controversy, *n.* A battle in which spittle or ink replaces the injurious cannonball and the inconsiderate bayonet.

Conversation, *n.* A fair for the display of the minor mental commodities, each exhibitor being too intent upon the arrangement of his own wares to observe those of his neighbor.

Coronation, *n.* The ceremony of investing a sovereign with the outward and visible signs of his divine right to be blown skyhigh with a dynamite bomb.

Corporation, *n.* An ingenious device for obtaining individual profit without individual responsibility.

Corsair, *n.* A politician of the seas.

Court Fool, *n.* The plaintiff.

Coward, *n.* One who in a perilous emergency thinks with his legs.

Craft, *n.* A fool's substitute for brains.

Crayfish, *n.* A small crustacean very much resembling the lobster, but less indigestible.

Creditor, *n.* One of a tribe of savages dwelling beyond the Financial Straits and dreaded for their desolating incursions.

Cremona, *n.* A high-priced violin made in Connecticut.

Critic, *n.* A person who boasts himself hard to please because nobody tries to please him.

Cui Bono? (Latin). What good would that do *me*?

Cunning, *n.* The faculty that distinguishes a weak animal or person from a strong one. It brings its possessor much mental satisfaction and great material adversity. An Italian proverb says: 'The furrier gets the skins of more foxes than asses.'



Cupid, n. The so-called god of love. This bastard creation of a barbarous fancy was no doubt inflicted upon mythology for the sins of its deities. Of all unbeautiful and inappropriate conceptions this is the most reasonless and offensive. The notion of symbolizing sexual love by a semisexless babe, and comparing the pains of passion to the wounds of an arrow – of introducing this pudgy homunculus into art grossly to materialize the subtle spirit and suggestion of the work – this is eminently worthy of the age that, giving it birth, laid it on the doorstep of posterity.

Curiosity, n. An objectionable quality of the female mind. The desire to know whether or not a woman is cursed with curiosity is one of the most active and insatiable passions of the masculine soul.

Curse, v.t. Energetically to belabor with a verbal slapstick.

Cynic, n. A blackguard whose faulty vision sees things as they are, not as they ought to be. Hence the custom among the Scythians of plucking out a cynic's eyes to improve his vision.



Dance, v.i. To leap about to the sound of tittering music, preferably with arms about your neighbor's wife or daughter. There are many kinds of dances, but all those requiring the participation of the two sexes have two characteristics in common: they are conspicuously innocent, and warmly loved by the vicious.

Daring, n. One of the most conspicuous qualities of a man in security.

Dawn, n. The time when men of reason go to bed. Certain old men prefer to rise at about that time, taking a cold bath and a long walk with an empty stomach, and otherwise mortifying the flesh. They then point with pride to these practices as the cause of their sturdy health and ripe years; the truth being that they are hearty and old, not because of their habits, but in spite of them. The reason we find only robust persons doing this thing is that it has killed all the others who have tried it.

Day, n. A period of twenty-four hours, mostly misspent. This period is divided into two parts, the day proper and the night, or day improper – the former devoted to sins of business, the latter

consecrated to the other sort. These two kinds of social activity overlap.

Debauchee, *n.* One who has so earnestly pursued pleasure that he has had the misfortune to overtake it.

Debt, *n.* An ingenious substitute for the chain and whip of the slave-driver.

Decalogue, *n.* A series of commandments, ten in number – just enough to permit an intelligent selection for observance, but not enough to embarrass the choice. Following is the revised edition of the Decalogue, calculated for this meridian.

Thou shalt no God but me adore:
'Twere too expensive to have more.

No images nor idols make
For Robert Ingersoll to break.

Take not God's name in vain; select
A time when it will have effect.

Work not on Sabbath days at all,
But go to see the teams play ball.

Honor thy parents. That creates
For life insurance lower rates.

Kill not, abet not those who kill;
Thou shalt not pay thy butcher's bill.

Kiss not thy neighbor's wife, unless
Thine own thy neighbor doth caress.

Don't steal; thou'lt never thus compete
Successfully in business. Cheat.

Bear not false witness – that is low –
But 'hear 'tis rumored so and so.'

Covet thou naught that thou hast not
By hook or crook, or somehow, got.

Decide, *v.i.* To succumb to the preponderance of one set of influences over another set.

Defame, *v.t.* To lie about another. To tell the truth about another.

Defenceless, *adj.* Unable to attack.

Degradation, *n.* One of the stages of moral and social progress from private station to political

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