

Brighter English

Revised Edition

C. E. Eckersley

Brighter English

A BOOK OF SHORT STORIES
PLAYS, POEMS AND ESSAYS
WITH EXERCISES

By C. E. ECKERSLEY

Revised Edition



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PREFACE

THE main criticism of my *England and the English* was that it was rather too difficult for all except advanced students, and there were several requests for an easier book leading up to it. In response to these, my publishers asked me to prepare a volume on similar lines, simpler—but not childish—and keeping, if possible, the same preponderance of modern writers and the same high literary quality in the extracts that had been a feature of the earlier book. It is hoped that these requirements have been met in *Brighter English*. The names of such contributors as John Galsworthy, H. G. Wells, J. B. Priestley, Somerset Maugham, James Thurber, Aldous Huxley, Robert Lynd, Alfred Noyes, "Saki", Ivor Brown, and Gilbert Frankau bear sufficient testimony to the excellence and modernity and interest of the material. The short biographies or critical appreciations that precede the contributions of most of the authors will, perhaps, help to arouse or increase this interest.

As in *England and the English*, each extract is followed by a number of exercises based on the preceding reading matter. These exercises are considerably easier than those in the earlier volume, and should be well within the scope of the average student. The exercises take in vocabulary, grammar, punctuation, idiom, pronunciation, use of prepositions, direct and indirect speech, "comprehension", paraphrase, figures of speech, and sentence structure, while the composition exercises are designed to give practice in the writing of essays, letters, telegrams, and précis on subjects that, it is hoped, will awaken the interest of the student, so that *Brighter English* will bring better English.

C. E. E.

NOTE TO THE FOURTH EDITION (1959)

THE present edition of *Brighter English* is substantially the same as the previous ones. But some further biographical and critical notes have been added and others have been brought up to date. A few changes of material have also been made; thus Browning's *Pied Piper of Hamelin* has been replaced by two shorter, simpler but still characteristic poems, and for contrast two short poems by Browning's greatest contemporary, Tennyson, have been added. Kipling's *The Sons of Martha* and Lynd's *Fear of Heights* have also been omitted. In all these changes and in the correction of one or two errors I have been greatly helped by the suggestions and criticisms of teachers and students both at home and overseas, and to all these helpers I extend my sincere thanks.

C. E. E.

PUBLISHER'S NOTE (1972)

Teachers will note that all the passages in this book were written before the British currency was decimalised in 1971. Sums of money are therefore expressed in pounds, shillings and pence throughout.

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SHORT STORIES

THE LUNCHEON

By W. SOMERSET MAUGHAM (1874-)

Few writers are more popular either in England or abroad than Somerset Maugham. He was born in 1874 and, after studying at Heidelberg and St Thomas's Hospital, London, he qualified as a doctor. But he preferred to devote his life to literature. He has achieved success as a novelist with such novels as *Of Human Bondage*, *Cakes and Ale*, *The Razor's Edge*; and as a dramatist in the witty, satirical plays *Our Betters*, *The Circle*, and *The Breadwinner*; but his greatest success has been gained, perhaps, by his short stories. Maugham is a realist with a cool, unemotional (some people might say a cynical) outlook on life. He has an amazing skill for revealing, with a few touches, a situation and the essentials of character, and his rather acid stories are told with a lucidity and an economy of words that are the marks of the supreme craftsman.

I caught sight of her at the play, and in answer to her beckoning¹ I went over during the interval and sat down beside her. It was long since I had last seen her, and if someone had not mentioned her name I hardly think I would have recognised her. She addressed me brightly.

"Well, it's many years since we first met. How time does fly! We're none of us getting any younger. Do you remember the first time I saw you? You asked me to luncheon."

Did I remember?

It was twenty years ago and I was living in Paris. I had a tiny apartment in the Latin quarter overlooking a cemetery,² and I was earning barely enough money to keep body and soul together. She had read a book of

¹ beckon = make a sign with the finger asking a person to come.

² cemetery = place where people are buried.

mine and had written to me about it. I answered, thanking her, and presently I received from her another letter saying that she was passing through Paris and would like to have a chat¹ with me; but her time was limited, and the only free moment she had was on the following Thursday; she was spending the morning at the Luxembourg and would I give her a little luncheon at Foyot's afterwards? Foyot's is a restaurant at which the French senators eat, and it was so far beyond my means that I had never even thought of going there. But I was flattered, and I was too young to have learned to say no to a woman. (Few men, I may add, learn this until they are too old to make it of any consequence² to a woman what they say.) I had eighty francs (gold francs) to last me the rest of the month, and a modest luncheon should not cost more than fifteen. If I cut out coffee for the next two weeks I could manage well enough.

I answered that I would meet my friend—by correspondence—at Foyot's on Thursday at half-past twelve. She was not so young as I expected and in appearance imposing rather than attractive. She was, in fact, a woman of forty (a charming age, but not one that excites a sudden and devastating³ passion at first sight), and she gave me the impression of having more teeth, white and large and even, than were necessary for any practical purpose. She was talkative, but since she seemed inclined to talk about me I was prepared to be an attentive listener.

I was startled when the bill of fare was brought, for the prices were a great deal higher than I had anticipated.⁴ But she reassured⁵ me.

"I never eat anything for luncheon," she said.

¹ chat = friendly talk.

² consequence = importance.

³ devastating = destructive; causing ruin; sweeping everything before it.

⁴ anticipate = expect.

⁵ reassure = set a person's mind at rest.

"Oh, don't say that!" I answered generously.

"I never eat more than one thing. I think people eat far too much nowadays. A little fish, perhaps. I wonder if they have any salmon."

Well, it was early in the year for salmon and it was not on the bill of fare, but I asked the waiter if there was any. Yes, a beautiful salmon had just come in, it was the first they had had. I ordered it for my guest. The waiter asked her if she would have something while it was being cooked.

"No," she answered, "I never eat more than one thing. Unless you have a little caviare. I never mind caviare."

My heart sank a little. I knew I could not afford caviare, but I could not very well tell her that. I told the waiter by all means bring caviare. For myself I chose the cheapest dish on the menu and that was a mutton chop.

"I think you are unwise to eat meat," she said. "I don't know how you can expect to work after eating heavy things like chops. I don't believe in overloading my stomach."

Then came the question of drink.

"I never drink anything for luncheon," she said.

"Neither do I," I answered promptly.

"Except white wine," she proceeded as though I had not spoken. "These French white wines are so light. They're wonderful for the digestion."

"What would you like?" I asked, hospitable¹ still, but not exactly effusive.²

She gave me a bright and amicable flash of her white teeth.

"My doctor won't let me drink anything but champagne."

I fancy I turned a trifle pale. I ordered half a bottle.

¹ hospitable = generous in the treatment of a guest.

² effusive = overdoing sign of pleasure.

I mentioned casually¹ that my doctor had absolutely forbidden me to drink champagne.

"What are you going to drink, then?"

"Water."

She ate the caviare and she ate the salmon. She talked gaily of art and literature and music. But I wondered what the bill would come to. When my mutton chop arrived she took me quite seriously to task.

"I see that you're in the habit of eating a heavy luncheon. I'm sure it's a mistake. Why don't you follow my example and just eat one thing? I'm sure you'd feel ever so much better for it."

"I am only going to eat one thing," I said, as the waiter came again with the bill of fare.

She waved him aside with an airy gesture.

"No, no, I never eat anything for luncheon. Just a bite, I never want more than that, and I eat that more as an excuse for conversation than anything else. I couldn't possibly eat anything more unless they had some of those giant asparagus. I should be sorry to leave Paris without having some of them."

My heart sank. I had seen them in the shops, and I knew that they were horribly expensive. My mouth had often watered at the sight of them.

"Madame wants to know if you have any of those giant asparagus," I asked the waiter.

I tried with all my might to will him to say no. A happy smile spread over his broad, priest-like face, and he assured me that they had some so large, so splendid, so tender, that it was a marvel.

"I'm not in the least hungry," my guest sighed, "but if you insist I don't mind having some asparagus."

I ordered them.

"Aren't you going to have any?"

¹ casually = in passing; as if it was of no great importance.

"No, I never eat asparagus."

"I know there are people who don't like them. The fact is, you ruin your palate¹ by all the meat you eat."

We waited for the asparagus to be cooked. Panic seized me. It was not a question now how much money I should have left over for the rest of the month, but whether I had enough to pay the bill. It would be mortifying² to find myself ten francs short and be obliged to borrow from my guest. I could not bring myself to do that. I knew exactly how much I had, and if the bill came to more I made up my mind that I would put my hand in my pocket and with a dramatic cry start up and say it had been picked. Of course, it would be awkward if she had not money enough either to pay the bill. Then the only thing would be to leave my watch and say I would come back and pay later.

The asparagus appeared. They were enormous, succulent,³ and appetising. The smell of the melted butter tickled my nostrils as the nostrils of Jehovah were tickled by the burned offerings of the virtuous Semites. I watched the abandoned⁴ woman thrust them down her throat in large voluptuous mouthfuls, and in my polite way I discoursed on the condition of the drama in the Balkans. At last she finished.

"Coffee?" I said.

"Yes, just an ice-cream and coffee," she answered.

I was past caring now, so I ordered coffee for myself and an ice-cream and coffee for her.

"You know, there's one thing I thoroughly believe in," she said, as she ate the ice-cream. "One should always get up from a meal feeling one could eat a little more."

"Are you still hungry?" I asked faintly.

¹ palate = sense of taste.

² mortifying = causing embarrassment.

³ succulent = juicy.

⁴ abandoned = wicked

"Oh, no, I'm not hungry; you see, I don't eat luncheon. I have a cup of coffee in the morning and then dinner, but I never eat more than one thing for luncheon. I was speaking for you."

"Oh, I see!"

Then a terrible thing happened. While we were waiting for the coffee the head waiter, with an ingratiating¹ smile on his false face, came up to us bearing a large basket full of huge peaches. They had the blush of an innocent girl; they had the rich tone of an Italian landscape. But surely peaches were not in season then? Lord knew what they cost. I knew too—a little later, for my guest, going on with her conversation, absentmindedly² took one.

"You see, you've filled your stomach with a lot of meat"—my one miserable little chop—"and you can't eat any more. But I've just had a snack³ and I shall enjoy a peach.

The bill came, and when I paid it I found that I had only enough for a quite inadequate⁴ tip. Her eyes rested for an instant on the three francs I left for the waiter, and I knew that she thought me mean. But when I walked out of the restaurant I had the whole month before me and not a penny in my pocket.

"Follow my example," she said as we shook hands, "and never eat more than one thing for luncheon."

"I'll do better than that," I retorted. "I'll eat nothing for dinner to-night."

"Humorist!" she cried gaily, jumping into a cab. "You're quite a humorist!"

But I have had my revenge at last. I do not believe that I am a vindictive⁵ man, but when the immortal

¹ ingratiating = wanting to get into favour.

² absentmindedly = with thoughts not on the subject.

³ snack = very small, quick meal.

⁴ inadequate = not sufficient.

⁵ vindictive = spiteful.

gods take a hand in the matter it is pardonable to observe the result with complacency.¹ To-day she weighs twenty-one stone.²

EXERCISES

I. These are some of the words used in the story. Find the meaning of them and use each one in a sentence:

- | | | |
|--------------|---------------|---------------|
| 1. beckon | 8. practical | 15. panic |
| 2. interval | 9. startled | 16. awkward |
| 3. apartment | 10. generous | 17. nostrils |
| 4. flatter | 11. caviare | 18. thrust |
| 5. modest | 12. overload | 19. discourse |
| 6. imposing | 13. ruin | 20. forbid |
| 7. gesture | 14. expensive | |

II. The following idiomatic phrases occurred in this story. Notice how each is used and make sentences containing each of them:

1. catch sight of (p. 1).
2. to keep body and soul together (p. 1).
3. spend the morning (p. 2).
4. beyond my means (p. 2).
5. I cut out coffee (p. 2).
6. I could manage (p. 2).
7. At first sight (p. 2).
8. I never mind (p. 3).
9. my heart sank (p. 3).
10. by all means (p. 3).
11. I turned a trifle pale (p. 3).
12. she took me seriously to task (p. 4).
13. my mouth watered (p. 4).

¹ complacency = self-satisfaction.

² a stone = 14 pounds (6.35 kilos).

14. if you insist (p. 4).
15. the fact is (p. 5).
16. my pocket had been picked (p. 5).
17. peaches were not in season (p. 6).
18. take a hand in the matter (p. 7).

III. Insert the prepositions omitted here. The phrases or sentences are all taken from *The Luncheon*.

1. I caught sight — her — the play.
2. She had read a book — mine and had written — me — it.
3. She gave me the impression — having more teeth than were necessary — any practical purpose.
4. It was early — the year — salmon and it was not — the bill — fare.
5. I never drink anything — lunch — white wine.
6. You'd feel much better — it.
7. I should be sorry to leave Paris — having some — them.
8. I tried — all my might.
9. The waiter with a smile — his face brought a basket full — peaches.
10. Her eyes rested — an instant — the three francs I had left — the waiter.
11. I had the whole month — me and not a penny — my pocket.

IV. Complete the following familiar idiomatic comparisons:

- | | |
|------------------------|----------------------|
| 1. as sharp as a — | 6. as dry as a — |
| 2. as slippery as an — | 7. as thin as a — |
| 3. as mad as a — | 8. as quick as a — |
| 4. as drunk as a — | 9. as stiff as a — |
| 5. as sober as a — | 10. as hungry as a — |

COMPOSITION EXERCISES

- I. Tell the story of *The Luncheon* in about 400 words.
- II. Tell the story as the waiter might have told it.
- III. Describe exactly how you would:
(a) cook a mutton chop, (b) make coffee.
- IV. Describe an embarrassing experience (real or imaginary) that you have had.

NINE NEEDLES

By JAMES THURBER (1894-1961)

James Grover Thurber is perhaps the best-known of modern American humorists. He was born in Columbus, Ohio, and after studying at Ohio State University was a reporter for various American newspapers and for the *Chicago Tribune* in Paris. In addition to being an author, he was a brilliant cartoonist and generally illustrated his own books with drawings that have the same qualities of irony, satire, and fantastic humour as his prose sketches of twentieth-century American life. His best-known books are *Is Sex Necessary?*, *The Owl in the Attic*, *The Seal in the Bedroom*, *My Life and Hard Times*, *The Middle-aged Man on the Flying Trapeze*, *Let Your Mind Alone* (from which the following sketch is taken), and *The Last Flower*.

One of the more spectacular¹ minor happenings of the past few years which I am sorry that I missed took place in the Columbus, Ohio, home of some friends of a friend of mine. It seems that a Mr Albatross, while looking for something in his medicine cabinet one morning, discovered a bottle of a kind of patent medicine which his wife had been taking for a stomach ailment. Now, Mr Albatross is one of those apprehensive² men who are afraid of patent medicines and of almost everything else. Some weeks before, he had encountered a

¹ spectacular = striking; unusual; providing a fine show.

² apprehensive = easily made frightened.