

ASK ME ANOTHER

The Question Book

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"A man will turn over half
a library to make one book."

—SAMUEL JOHNSON.

"We'll tell the cock-eyed world."

—THE AUTHORS.

Ask Me Another!

THE QUESTION BOOK

Compiled by

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With a Preface by

ROBERT BENCHLEY



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To

HERBERT BAYARD SWOPE

who might have dictated the answers
to these questions and spared the
authors the trouble of looking them
up, this book is dedicated.

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PREFACE

BY ROBERT BENCHLEY

When Mr. Esty, one of the compilers of this volume, called me up and asked if I could give him fifteen of my precious minutes in which to propound a set of questions, I was, I am afraid, a little impatient.

In the first place, I didn't quite understand over the telephone just what it was he wanted to do to me. I suspected that he was one of those people like Alexander Woolcott who are constantly throwing parties into a turmoil of indifference by announcing that they represent some famous character in history or literature and that you must guess who it is. I have found that the best way to handle such people is to guess right away that they represent Guy Fawkes and to stick to it in spite of their denials. They soon get very cross and threaten to stop playing the game entirely, at which point a notary is produced and they are taken at their word and bundled off to bed.

But there was something winning in Mr. Esty's voice, and when he said that he had just given the test to a number of College Presidents with no bad results other than a slight giddiness, I admitted that I would be in my office for the next half hour, adding that I was very busy, which was not true.

In an incredibly short space of time Mr. Esty was at my side (I rather think that he was calling from the next room) and had handed me a typewritten list of fifty questions. I again said that I was very busy and began. On the very second question I fell down miserably. I had no idea what make of automobile was air-cooled; in fact, I didn't know that in this day and age it was necessary to cool them at all. (I am still wondering if the alternative to air-cooling is ice-packs, but I wouldn't dare ask.)

Mr. Esty could hardly believe that I didn't know this. He did everything that was in his power to bring me to my senses. He even framed his lips to form the first syllable of "Franklin," a tip which lured me into suggesting "Ford" and "Fiat". It was at last decided that I simply did not know the answer, and, blushing prettily, I went on to the next.

As a matter of fact, if my score is printed in connection with the test that I took, allowance must be made for a wholly generous attitude on Mr. Esty's part toward my answers. He accepted as correct certain abortive sounds which I made as feelers, and, I am sure, gave me an "A" on a vague mumbling in the proper meter in lieu of the second line to "It was the schooner Hesperus."

But, cheating or no cheating, the thing got me. I finished my list and, according to my warning of being very busy, should have stopped there and plunged into my waiting work. And Mr. Esty was quite willing to go. But I would have none of it.

"You have another list there?" I asked, peering into his brief-case.

"Oh, yes, there are lots of lists," he replied, preparing to strap them up. "But all we ask of one man is to take one test."

"What is that one that you are putting in there?" I insisted, blocking his way.

"That is the one on Literature," he said. "President Neilson got one hundred on that one."

"Oh he did, did he?" I said. "Might I look at it, please?"

And with that I was off on the Literature test. Aided by Mr. Esty's indulgence and a knowledge of lip-reading I finished slightly behind President Neilson, in the next squadron, in fact. Well, President Neilson ought to get a hundred. That's his job.

By this time, I was worked up into a lather. A strange light had come into my eyes and I was reaching greedily for more lists, muttering, "Let me try this one," or "How about this? Who took this one?" I

seemed to be deriving not only a glow of sinful pride in the questions that I could answer but a masochistic pleasure in failing. Mr. Esty was getting hungry. The scrub-women had begun upsetting things in the office in their nightly rounds of letter-hiding. We were soon alone. But still I was insatiable. "More lists!" I cried. "More lists, Mr. Esty!" . . . Late that night I carried Mr. Esty, fainting with hunger and ennui, out into the street.

"When will the book be out?" I asked him.

"What book?" he said, weakly.

* * * * *

This was just the beginning, however. The next night I went out to dinner. I could hardly wait to tell of my experience and the rest could hardly wait to hear about it. Some of them, in fact, didn't.

But those who remained were easy victims. "A man came around to my office last night," I began, "with a list of fifty questions and——"

I was greeted with hoots. "One of *those*?" they cried. "And you probably fell for them."

"Well," I replied, holding myself in, "it was pretty interesting at that."

"Yeah?" said one. "What were some of the questions?"

"Well, for example," I said, "what President of the United States was grandfather of what President?"

There was a chorus of scornful "John Adams's."

Waiting for silence I said as casually as I could, "John Adams was John Quincy Adams's *father*. The question was *grandfather*."

And then, imitating Mr. Esty's tantalizing tactics, I started to leave the group.

But they were already on fire. I was seized and made to divulge the name of the lucky grandfather. (See answers in the back of the book.) I was pressed for more questions. People came running from

other parts of the room to see what the trouble was about. They, too, had to be quizzed. The smugness with which I propounded the very questions on which I myself had failed the day before must have been well-nigh unbearable, but the general thirst for ordeal by questionnaire was too strong and I was besieged with cries of "What were some of the other questions?" and "Ask us another, Uncle Bob!"

From that night on I have been a social success. No matter where I go or how dull the party, I can make myself the center of a maelstrom of interest simply by telling the strange story of Mr. Esty and his fifty questions. What will happen now that a whole book of them is out is something that I do not care to think about. I wouldn't be surprised to see a complete cessation of business and a national fiesta given over to asking questions. At that, a lot worse things could happen to this country.

AUTHORS' FOREWORD

The sole purpose of this book is to provide entertainment by giving an opportunity to test one's knowledge in competition with others.

Most of us take our mental equipment rather for granted. Usually our friends have somewhat the same range of interests as ourselves, and, in the ordinary course of events, no chance occurs to find out how broad our knowledge really is. Here, one can match up against worthy competition and experience the thrill which comes of improving one's score by finally dragging forth a reluctant and protesting bit of information from some deep recess of the mind where it has lain hidden until a frantic search at last reveals its hiding-place.

In order that this thrill may be enjoyed with some degree of frequency, we have tried to choose questions whose answers, at some time or other, have been available to the majority of readers. To give a fair chance to all, questions on abstruse or technical points have been avoided and good scores on the thirty General Quizzes will result from breadth rather than depth of knowledge. The range of subjects covered by them is so diversified that, so far, no one has been able to score one hundred per cent. Ten Special Quizzes, however, have been included for the benefit of those who wish to test themselves more thoroughly in a limited field.

The basis on which the questions were selected was that we either

- (1) knew the answers ourselves, or
- (2) felt that we should have known the answers, or
- (3) considered the answers interesting additions to our stock of information.

The book has been so designed that it is possible for the reader to try himself out in competition with a list of opponents hand-picked by ourselves, but this is intended to be only the beginning of a larger list of

opponents, hand-picked by each individual owner of the book. The value and interest of the list of scores on each quiz will constantly increase as the book is used. Space has been left after each question, so that a reader may jot down his answer in case he is taking a quiz by himself; but when more than one person is involved, it is intended that the answers be given orally.

There are many ways in which the book can be used as a game; as interesting variations, we suggest that

1. A reader try himself against the scores given with each quiz.
2. He try his friends against these scores and any additional scores which have been added.
3. Two or more persons answer the questions in turn, being scored on the number of questions which they are asked.
4. Two or more persons answer each question together, waiting until each has signified his readiness to answer.
5. Four or more persons divide into teams, with spokesmen to voice the composite wisdom of each team.
6. A group of persons answer in turn, using the principle of the spelling bee.
7. A person be given a test which he has already taken (and to which he has heard the answers), after a short lapse of time, to see how much he will improve his score. This can be tried with or without warning the answerer.
8. All of the above methods be modified by having a time limit of from 15 to 60 seconds allowed for the answer to each question.

It is likely that each reader will develop his own technique for scoring. However, as a guide, we suggest as standard practice the method followed by ourselves in grading those whose names appear at the head of each quiz.

Since there are fifty questions to each quiz, two percentage points

were given for a correct answer. In the main, the answers were considered as wholly right or wholly wrong, but occasionally one point was given for a partial answer. No fractional credits were given, a question which was answered two-thirds right, for example, being credited with two points, rather than with one and a fraction.

Some latitude was allowed in judging whether an answer deserved full credit. Three examples are given below of answers which would be given full credit, though they fell short of being perfect:

An answer of "Holland" to the question: "Where does ex-Kaiser Wilhelm II. now live?"—though "Doorn, the Netherlands" is more exact.

An answer of "It falls as the something dew from above" to the question: "What is the next line after, 'The quality of mercy is not strained,'"—though "It droppeth as the gentle rain from heaven" is the exact quotation.

An answer of "Pius" to the question: "What is the name of the present Pope?"—though "Pius XI. (born Achille Ratti)" is much more exact. It should be noted, however, that the question, "Who was King of England at the time of the American Revolution?" is not sufficiently answered by "George," since the distinction between George III. and the other Georges who have been kings of England is more sharply defined in people's minds.

Perhaps the best general rule that can be followed is to require answers which are correct as to essentials, even though incomplete as to details.

* * * * *

In concluding, we take this opportunity to thank all those who have helped toward making this book interesting and accurate, either by permitting us to use their scores in the book or by suggesting changes in the subject matter.

JUSTIN SPAFFORD

LUCIEN ESTY

New York, January, 1927.

GENERAL QUIZZES

Numbers One to Thirty



