

**BURGESS UNABRIDGED: A
NEW DICTIONARY OF
WORDS YOU HAVE
ALWAYS NEEDED**

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Burgess Unabridged: A New Dictionary of Words You Have Always Needed by Gelett Burgess

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GELETT BURGESS

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A New Dictionary
of Words you have always Needed

BY GELETT BURGESS

*Author of "Goops," "Are You a Bromide?"
"The Maxims of Methuselah," "The
Maxims of Noah," &c.*

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Gift of
Thomas W. Lament.

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 September, 1914

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WOWZE

A conscientious tangoist inflated with her vanity
Attempting to excel a silly partner in inanity . . . *Frontispiece*

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INTRODUCTION

Yes, I have written a dictionary. Worcester and Webster are all right in their way, and Stormuth will do very well for Englishmen — but they're not up to date. Mrs. Century's book is a bit better and even old Dr. Standard's Compendium of Useful Information includes my own words, "bromide" and "sulphite." It's good enough for last year, but "Burgess Unabridged" will give the diction of the year 1915.

For, the fact is, English is a growing language, and we have to let out the tucks so often, that no last season's model will ever fit it. English isn't like French, which is corseted and gloved and clad and shod and hatted strictly according to the rules of the Immortals. We have no Academy, thank Heaven, to tell what is real English and what isn't. Our Grand Jury is that ubiquitous person, Usage, and we keep him pretty busy at his job. He's a Progressive and what he likes, he'll have, in spite of lexicographers, college professors and authors of "His Complete Works." That's the reason why English has ousted Volapük and Esperanto as a world language. It snuggles right down where you live and makes itself at home.

How does English shape itself so comfortably to the body of our thought? With a new wrinkle here and a little more breadth there, with fancy trimmings, new styles, fresh materials and a genius for adapting itself to all sorts of wear. Everybody is working at it, tailoring it, fitting it, decorating it. There is no person so humble but that he can suggest an improvement that may easily become the reigning mode.

Slang, I once defined as "The illegitimate sister of Poetry" — but slang is sometimes better than that; it often succeeds in marrying the King's English, and at that ceremony there are dozens of guests. There's the poker player, who con-

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tributes for his wedding present, "The limit" and "Make good" and "Four flush." Politics hands over "Boodle," "Mugwump" and "Gerrymander." The thief presents his "Jimmy," "Doss," "Kip," "Heeler," "Split," "Lag," "Swag" and "Dope." The horse race gives us "Neck and neck"; baseball, "Putting one over." Even the baby offers "Goo-goo." Illustrations, however, are boring.

But slang, strictly, consists in the adaptation of phrases; it does not often — not often enough at any rate — coin new words. Thieves' patter or jargon or cant provides us almost with a language of itself, and words from the Underworld are continually being added to the language. Like the turkey trot, "We first endure, then pity, then embrace." So from all sources the language recruits new phrases, new expressions, even new rules of grammar. Horrible as they are to the conservative, common usage accepts them and they become classic. Professor Lounsbury of Yale is kept busy justifying them. He, alone of all grammarians, sees that the split infinitive must come, that verbs must be constructed of nouns. He recognizes the new function of the potential mood, in "I should worry" and "Wouldn't that jar you?"

Yes, it's easy enough to coin a phrase, to adapt an old word to a new use, like "Chestnut" and "Lemon" and "Peach." It's easy to abbreviate words, like "Gent" and "Pants" and "Exam" and "Phone" and "Stylo." It's easier still to fill the new dictionary with new derivatives from Latin or Greek or crowd in French. The scientific word requires a little invention. "Radioactive" and "Aileron" and "Hypofenyltribrompropionic" need only a scholastic delving in ancient tongues. But to invent a new word right out of the air or the cigarette smoke is another thing. And that's what I determined to do.

Yes, I know it has been tried, but it's never been seriously and deliberately gone about. It has been haphazard work, the result of a mere accident, or vaudeville high spirits. But the way such neologisms have become quickly current shows that here's a field for high endeavor, and a little success with