

THE CYNIC'S WORD BOOK

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649090549

The cynic's word book by Ambrose Bierce

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Edited by Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd.
Cover @ 2017

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AMBROSE BIERCE

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PREFACE

WITH reference to certain actual and possible questions of priority and originality, it may be explained that this Word Book was begun in the San Francisco "Wasp" in the year 1881, and has been continued, in a desultory way, in several journals and periodicals. As it was no part of the author's purpose to define all the words in the language, or even to make a complete alphabetical series, the stopping-place of the book was determined by considerations of bulk. In the event of this volume proving acceptable to that part of the reading public to which in humility it

PREFACE

is addressed—enlightened souls who prefer dry wines to sweet, sense to sentiment, good English to slang, and wit to humor—there may possibly be another if the author be spared for the compiling.

A conspicuous, and it is hoped not unpleasing, feature of the book is its abundant illustrative quotations from eminent poets, chief of whom is that learned and ingenious cleric, Father Gassalasca Jape, S. J., whose lines bear his initials. To Father Jape's kindly encouragement and assistance the author of the prose text is greatly indebted.

A. B.

WASHINGTON, D. C.,

May, 1906

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ABASEMENT, *n.* A decent and customary mental attitude in the presence of wealth or power. Peculiarly appropriate in an employé 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.

Poor Isabella's dead, whose abdication
Set all tongues wagging in the Spanish nation.
For that performance 't were unfair to scold her :
She wisely left a throne too hot to hold her.
To History she 'll be no royal riddle —
Merely a plain parched pea that jumped the griddle.
G. 7.

ABDOMEN, *n.* The temple of the god Stomach, in whose worship,

A THE CYNIC'S WORD BOOK

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 half-hearted and inefficient 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