

# Cuttings from a Nonsense Book

Words by Gelett Burgess

Music by John Kilpatrick

## USER GUIDE

*Frontispiece of the London Edition*

# THE BURGESS NONSENSE BOOK

*Being a Complete Collection of the Humorous Masterpieces of*  
GELETT BURGESS, ESQ.,  
Sometime Editor of the "*Lark*," "*Le Petit Journal des Refusées*," & "*Enfant Terrible*"

Including the "PURPLE COW" with Forty Odd *Nonsense Quatrains*, The "CHEWING GUM MAN" *Epics*, the "GERRISH" *Ghost Stories*, *Poems of PATAGONIA*, *Curious Cartoons*, *Autobiographies of Famous GOOPS*, & a Myriad *Impossibilities*, adorned with less than

*A Million Heart-Rending Illustrations by the Author*

¶ The *Whole* forming a *Book of Blissful Bosh* for the *Blasé*; an *Amusing Antidote* to *Modern Neurasthenia*; a *Stimulating Spur* to *Thoughtlessness*, & a *Restful Recreation* for the *Super-Civilized*, the *Over-Educated*, & the *Hyper-Refined*. Carefully *Expurgated* of all *Reason*, *Purpose*, & *Verisimilitude* by a *Corps* of *Irresponsible Idiots*. An *Extraneous Tome of Twaddle*, an *Infallible*

## CYCLOPÆDIA of BALDERDASH

Ferocious Fancies & Inconsequential Vagaries  
Than which, Nothing could be More So

LONDON: SIMPKIN, MARSHALL,  
HAMILTON, KENT AND CO. LTD.

## Frank Gelett Burgess (January 30, 1866 – September 18, 1951)



A Bostonian by birth, Burgess's individuality in a staid society was marked by his habit of climbing church steeples (on the inside) and inscribing his initials in Phoenician script (see his signature after the Epigram). He later left for the attractions of San Francisco, where he found employment as a draftsman, and in 1891 was hired by the University of California at Berkeley as a drawing instructor. Fortunately for posterity, he became implicated in the destruction of an unloved public statue, and in 1894 had to resign his post, after which he set upon his new career as writer and humorist.

In 1895 he founded a small-time magazine called "The Lark", and in its first issue included a quatrain that became famous in America:

I never saw a purple cow / I never hope to see one;  
But I can tell you anyhow / I'd rather see than be one!

When he tired of being approached in the street by people quoting that rhyme at him, he countered with the one labelled "Confession" in this guide. Those, with many other nonsense quatrains, each typically preceded by an introductory couplet, appeared in 1901 in *The Burgess Nonsense Book*, which was later, in 1914, also published in London, with only the necessary changes on the opening pages, such as the London publisher.

There are many later books (about "goops", for example), but Burgess's writings have never become well known in Britain in the way that has befallen those of Edward Lear or Lewis Carroll. I am lucky to have had his *Nonsense Book* from the age of 5 or earlier, and I have scarcely forgotten a word of it. My original copy has fallen to pieces, but it is still sometimes possible to obtain originals: these have one advantage over a recent print-on-demand edition in that the first 5 pages are not missing.

Burgess, like Lear and Carroll, was also a coiner of words. One, in particular, has found its way into the language: "blurb" – such as you have just been reading.

*John Kilpatrick*

## “Cuttings from a Nonsense Book”

The words are presented in the form of facsimiles assembled from the composer’s copy.

### 1. Introduction

#### Frontispiece:

The speaker announces a cut-down version of the original that is reproduced in full on the front cover of this guide.

#### Epigram:

*To him who vainly conjures sleep  
In counting visionary sheep;  
To her who, in the dentist’s power  
Would fain recall a gayer hour;  
To him who visits tiresome aunts,  
And comes upon this book by chance;  
To her who in the hammock lies,  
And, bored with Ibsen, BURGESS tries;  
To those who can’t remember dates  
While nonsense rhymes stick in their pates;  
To those who buy, and do not borrow,  
Nor put it off until to-morrow;  
To all who in these pages look,  
I dedicate this Nonsense Book!*

*Select Burgess  
JH*

### 2. Digital Extremities

#### On DIGITAL EXTREMITIES: A Poem, and a Gem it Is!



I’d Rather have Fingers than Toes;



I’d Rather have Ears than a Nose;  
And As for my Hair,  
I’m Glad it’s All There;

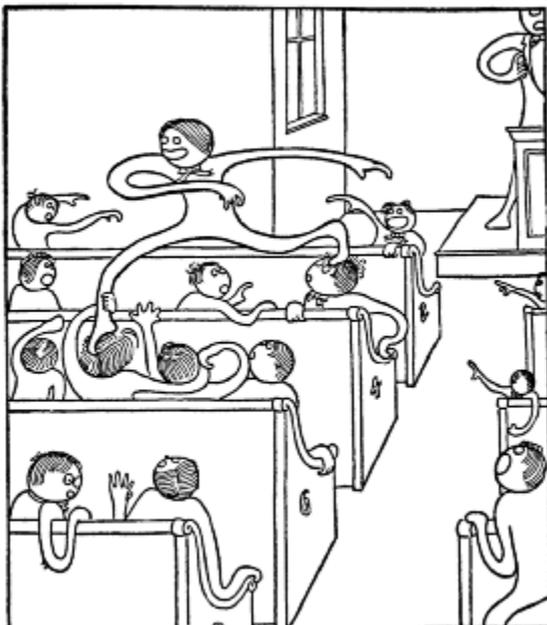


I’ll be Awfully Sad, when it Goes!

### 3. Cranial Ambulation (The Lecture)

#### THE LECTURE: A Slight Divagation Concerning Cranial Ambulation.

I Love to Go to Lectures,  
And Make the People Stare,



By Walking Round Upon Their Heads,  
And Spoiling People’s Hair!

### 4. City Flora (The Lamp Post)

#### On CITY FLORA : — Semi-Culled By One whose Fame is Somewhat Dulled.

There is a Theory Some Deny  
That Lamp  
Posts once were  
Three Foot  
High;



And a Little Boy  
was Terrible Strong,  
And he Stretched ‘em out to ‘Leven Foot  
Long!

## 5. My Fancies

**MY FANCIES:** Fatuous Vagaries  
Inspired by my Coal Hearted *Lares*.

My Fancies like the Flames Aspire;  
I Dream of Fame and Fate;



I See my Future in the Fire,  
And Oh, 't is Simply Grate!

## 6. Fugue in 24 keys

This instrumental interlude has no connection with Gelett Burgess, but could be considered appropriate to include, as it is somewhat nonsensical in its conception.

### Chord Sequence:

Am – B7 – Em – F#7 – Bm – C#7 – ... etc.

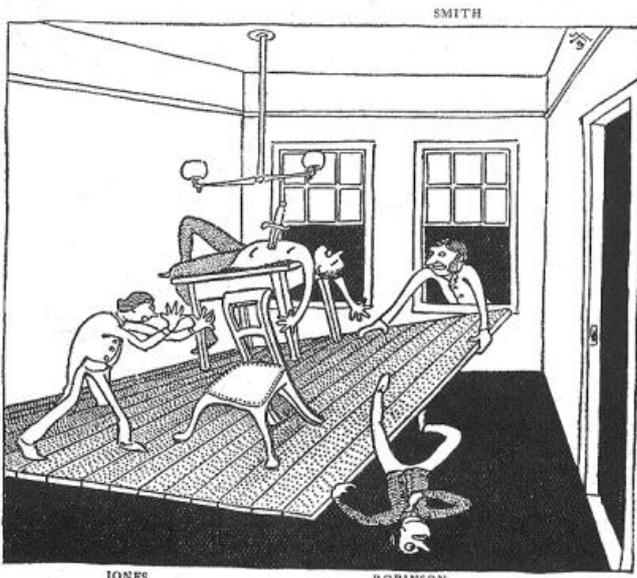
(The complete cycle of 24 keys is run through twice, with similar fugal entries on minor and major chords, each key at least once. There are thirty entries in total, with half the minor entries occurring twice.)

## 7a. The Minutes

*Nos. 7a and 7b are presented as alternatives.*

**THE MEETING OF A SOCIAL CLUB:**  
at Which

(The Secretary's Minutes Seem to Show)  
Proceedings did Not Go Without a Hitch.  
If you have Ever Been to One, You 'll Know!



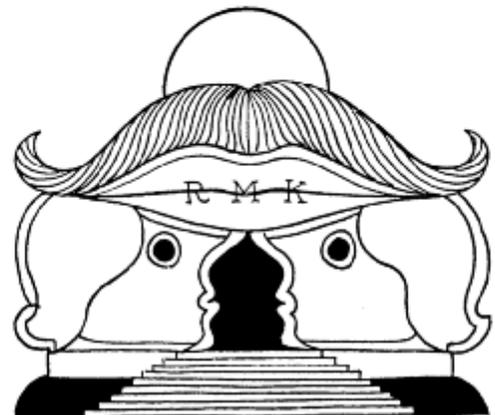
**A**s Mr. Smith still held the floor the chair objected to the motion made by Mr. Jones as being out of order. . . . Mr. Robinson, failing to receive his expected support, and not being recognized by the chair, dropped out of the discussion, there seemed to be a general desire to re-open the subject that had been laid upon the table.

## 7b. The Museum of Kisses

**THE MUSEUM OF KISSES:** Surely  
No One could Visit it Demurely.

**T**HIS is the place I'd like to burglarize;  
It is the Royal Museum of Kisses.  
It has an Annual Show, and gives a Prize  
To all the most deserving men and misses.

And ranged in various rows about the wall  
Are kisses, all deserving great attention;  
But in one room, the sweetest, best of all,  
Are those of one whose name I dare not mention!



## 8. The Floorless Room

**THE FLOORLESS ROOM: A Novel Sort  
Of Argument Without Support.**

I Wish that my Room had a Floor!  
I don't so Much Care for a Door,



But this Crawling Around  
Without Touching the Ground  
Is Getting to be Quite a Bore!

## 9. The Window Pain

**THE WINDOW PAIN: a Theme  
Symbolic,  
Pertaining to the Melon Colic.**

The Window has Four Little Panes;  
But One have I —



The Window Pains are in its Sash;  
I Wonder Why!

## 10. The Towel and the Door

**THE TOWEL AND THE DOOR, Ah, Well,  
The Moral I'd not Dare to Tell!**

The Towel Hangs Upon the Wall,  
And Somehow, I don't Care, at All!

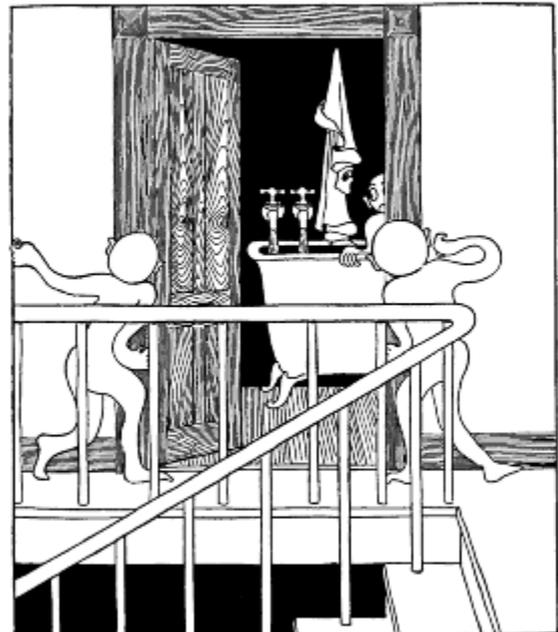


The Door is Open; I Must Say,  
I Rather Fancy it That Way!

## ... The Door and the Towel

**THE DOOR AND TOWEL, Once Again:  
Preposterous, Inverse, Insane!**

The Towel Hangs Upon the Wall,  
And somehow, I don't Care, at All!



The Door is Open; I Must Say,  
I Rather Fancy it That Way!

*(the music for The Door and the Towel reverses  
the harmonies of The Towel and the Door)*

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11a. The Purple Cow

THE PURPLE COW'S Projected Feast:  
Reflections on a Mythic Beast,  
Who's quite Remarkable, at Least.

I NEVER SAW A PURPLE COW,

I NEVER HOPE TO SEE ONE;



BUT I CAN TELL YOU, ANYHOW,

I'D RATHER SEE THAN BE ONE!

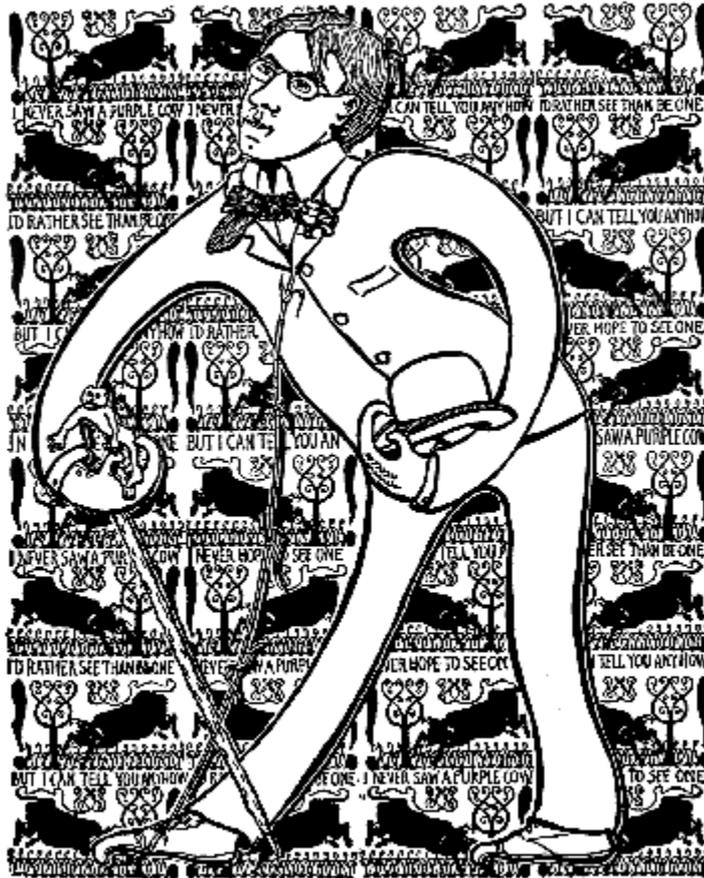
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11b. The Purpil Cowe



**A** MAYDE there was, femely and meke enow,  
She fate a-milken of a purpil Cowe :  
Rofy hire Cheke as in the Month of Maye,  
And fikerly her merry Songe was gay  
As of the Larke vprift, washen in Dewe ;  
Like Shene of Sterres, sperkled hire Eyen two.  
Now came ther by that Way a hendy Knight  
The Mayde espian in morwening Light.  
A faire Person he was — of Corage trewe  
With lufy Berd and Chekes of rody Hewe :  
Dere Ladye (quod he) far and wide I've ftraied  
Vncouthe Aventure in ftraunge Contrie made  
Fro Berwicke unto Ware. Pardé I vowe  
Erewhiles I never faw a purpil Cowe !  
Fayn wold I knowe how Catel thus can be?  
Tel me I pray you, of yore Courtesie !  
The Mayde hire Milken fent — Goode Sir she faide,  
The Master's Mandement on vs ylaid  
Decrees that in thefe yclept gilden Houres  
Hys Kyne shall ete of nought but Vylet Floures !

Ah, Yes! I Wrote the "Purple Cow" —  
I'm Sorry, now, I Wrote it!



But I can Tell you Anyhow,  
I'll Kill you if you Quote it!

## F I N I S

SO ENDS THE TOME: ARE YOU, MY FRIEND,  
AS GLAD AS I TO SEE THE END?  
HAVE YOU DONNED MOTLEY FOR THE MONEY  
AND FEARED YOUR JESTS WERE NONE TOO FUNNY?  
SO ENDS THE TOME: SO ENDS MY FOLLY;  
'TIS DISMAL WORK, THIS BEING JOLLY.  
NO MORE I'LL PLAY THE HARLEQUIN  
UNLESS MORE ROYALTIES COME IN.

## Works of Gelett Burgess

The Purple Cow (1895); a precursor to the Nonsense Book  
Vivette (1897); novelette  
The Lively City O'Ligg (1899); juvenile  
Goops, and How to be Them (1900); juvenile  
A Gage of Youth (1901); Poems, chiefly from The Lark  
The Burgess Nonsense Book (1901); prose and verse  
The Romance of the Commonplace (1901)  
More Goops, and How Not to Be Them (1903); juvenile  
The Reign of Queen Isyl (1903); short stories in collaboration with Will Irwin  
The Picaroons (1904); short stories in collaboration with Will Irwin  
The Rubaiyat of Omar Cayenne (1904); satire and parody  
Goop Tales (1904); juvenile  
A Little Sister of Destiny (1904); short stories  
Are You a Bromide? (1906); short book  
The White Cat (1907); novel  
The Heart Line (1907); novel  
The Maxims of Methuselah (1907); satire and parody  
Blue Goops and Red (1909); juvenile  
Lady Mechante (1909); novel  
The Master of Mysteries (1912)  
The Maxims of Noah (1913)  
Burgess Unabridged: a Dictionary of Words you have always needed (1914)  
The Goop Encyclopedia: Containing Every Child's Every Fault (1916); juvenile  
Have You an Educated Heart? (1923)  
Why Men Hate Women (1927)  
Ain't Angie Awful (1923)  
Look Eleven Years Younger (1937)  
The Purple Cow (1952); a reduced version of the full Nonsense Book

The above list is not complete. Many (possibly all) of the books, including The Burgess Nonsense Book, are available for reading in on-line form: try a search on "Gelett Burgess online books" and follow the online books link. Where there is a choice, the University of California copy is probably the one to go for.