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### *Stories of Chicago*

By George Ade. Edited with an introduction by Franklin J. Meine

(Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2003. Illustrations, notes.  
Clothbound, \$29.95; paperbound, \$15.95.)

*Stories of Chicago* is a recently republished collection of short stories written by Hoosier George Ade during the seven years (1893–1900) when he crafted the daily newspaper column “Stories of the Streets and of the Town” for the *Chicago Record*, the morning edition of the *Chicago Daily News*. Beginning in 1894, the paper’s publisher, Herbert S. Stone, republished a number of the stories in independent volumes. Both the newspaper column and many of the subsequent books were illustrated by John T. McCutcheon, Ade’s fraternity brother from his Purdue days and his Chicago apartment-mate.

A slightly rambling introduction by Franklin J. Meine, written in 1941, opens the book well by placing Ade and his stories squarely in the pantheon of noteworthy and representative nineteenth-century art. The University of Illinois Press chose rightly in reprinting these stories for those interested in studying the urban history of this period. A new introduction, however, would better serve the text by reminding the reader of the continued importance of Ade’s unique vision.

These deceptively simple stories resemble those of Mark Twain for their ability to strike at the heart of American personality types. In clear and simple language, the stories depict a wide variety of Chicagoans, including the office worker, the boarding house dweller, the Chinese laundry man, the junkman, and the street peddler. While the stories are aimed at the general newspaper consumer of the 1890s, Ade’s keen ability to see the city allows his work to transcend the usual limits of newspaper writing and break down barriers between “highbrow” and “lowbrow.” More than one hundred years later, his characters still resonate. In what may be termed a very midwestern style, and a particularly Hoosier type of straightforward satire, Ade brings the reader into the center of downtown Chicago to see the city as only an alert newcomer could—with open, enthusiastic eyes.

Ade chronicles many long-gone Chicago landmarks and practices of interest to urban historians today. Stories recall the heyday of the Illinois and Michigan canal—the waterway

which served as a source of Chicago's early economic power—as well as the produce market at Haymarket Square, and the Green Tree Inn, the oldest building in Chicago in the 1890s. Ade captures Chicago's quick growth in the tale “After the Sky-Scrapers, What?” Immediately after construction workers had completed a building, it seemed, the structure failed to live up to modern standards and was taken down again. Summarizing this phenomenon and, ultimately, the heart of the Chicago personality, Ade writes, “Chicago need not complain because the critics are not satisfied with this town. The town is never satisfied with itself” (p. 104).

From a twenty-first-century perspective, some of Ade's stories, because they explore the typicality of certain characters and use vernacular language and humor, read as racist or unacceptably close. No author could pen such composites today and not face a call onto the carpet. Ade's often-used black character “Pink Marsh,” “Aunt Mary” the African American woman who runs a “plantation-style” restaurant, and his Chinese laundry worker may make modern readers bristle. In his time, however, Ade's images no doubt brought white newspaper readers into unknown territories of Chicago, and increased their sympathy for a broad class of residents in the highly segregated city.

Because the stories exploit contemporary sentiments, they open a unique window into turn-of-the-century Chicago. For example, the closing story of the collection, “Effie Whittlesy,” is a story about hiring a new housekeeper, but ultimately offers a strong commentary on American class structure. Much to Mrs. Wallace's dismay, it turns out that the new maid, Effie, hails from the same home town as Mr. Wallace, making her a peer of the household head rather than a quiet helpmate. Thinking quickly, Mr. Wallace bribes Effie with a paid vacation and promise of another placement upon her return, thereby allowing Mrs. Wallace to resume her rightful spot as family matriarch without the challenge of having to feign friendship with her servant. Though seemingly light on the surface, Ade's stories remain an invaluable source for studying urban social history.

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