

The Widow of Ephesus

An Old-World Story in the New World-Language

Introduction by C. K. OGDEN

BASIC ENGLISH — the language into which this famous story of Petronius has been translated — is a purely practical attempt to solve the problem of a universal (auxiliary) language.

English is at present the natural or administrative language of over five hundred million people. It has taken five hundred years to create or convert these millions, and the maintenance and diffusion of English is now not only a primary commitment of the two greatest empires the world has ever seen, but also of a very large number of foreign education departments. In its ordinary form, however, it takes between three and four years to learn, and is proving too difficult both for the East and for the more primitive races. If it could be simplified so that anyone could learn to read it in a week, it might become the universal language in our own lifetime.

This is the thought which has guided those who for over ten years have labored on the analysis which resulted in the 850 Basic words, which can be legibly printed on the back of a single sheet of note paper. These 850 words (still further reduced to 600 for memorizing purposes) do all the work normally requiring twenty thousand.

The Orthological Institute was founded at 10, King's Parade, Cambridge, England to be the center of research, and it has already published a general introduction and grammar entitled *Basic English*, a model translation of the German novel *Carl and Anna*, and an account of the number of words people normally use, together with notes for translators (*The Basic Vocabulary*).

The Basic Vocabulary thus selected provides a second language for the entire world. Esperanto and other artificial languages have attempted to do this, though with little chance

of success, since there is no practical incentive to learn languages spoken only by scattered groups of enthusiasts. The chief characteristic of Basic is the absence of verbs, and the reader of the accompanying translation must not be misled by the appearance of verb forms. The ten "operators" (*put, go, etc.*), which when combined with the "directives" (*in, out, etc.*) take the place of verbs (*put in* = "insert"; *go in* = "enter"), are therefore the key to the system.

Basic (British, American, Scientific, International, Commercial) English is designed in the first place for the needs of trade, travel, radio, talkie, and (with the aid of special supplementary vocabularies) science. It is therefore necessary to emphasize that literary activity in a universal language is of the nature of a *tour de force*. Those who appreciate the emotive side of language will always be well advised to master one or more of the literatures outside their own mother tongue; but for the tens of millions to whom words are not the chief means of artistic expression, or whose concern is with any form of communication other than literature, the less time wasted on the acquisition of superfluous verbal habits, the better.

There are some, however, to whom a simple style such as Basic English demands will make a more direct appeal than all the elaborate tricks of the professional stylist. These will find in the present experiment not only a solution of the world's most pressing problem, Debabelization, but a new impetus to clarity, economy, and understanding, which may lead the way to another literary renaissance.

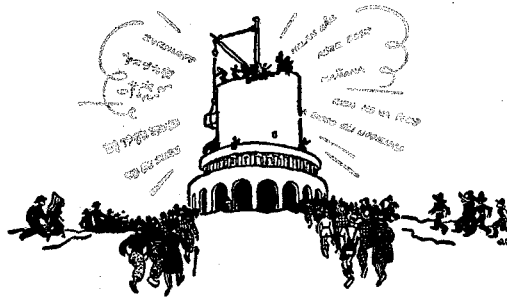
The story here translated contains 870 words, about 330 of which are different. Of the 850 different words in the Basic Vocabulary, just over 220 have been used, and the total is 1130

words, or about a third longer than the original. In the case of *Carl and Anna* about 700 Basic words were required to deal with a story twenty times the length of the one here translated. But however long the story, no more than 850 words would ever be used, whereas the originals in both cases imply a knowledge of twenty or thirty times this number — for it is obvious that they assume the reader to be acquainted at least with the *Pocket Oxford Dictionary*.

This means that once the Basic list has been committed to memory — and there are many persons who could, for a wager, achieve this in a couple of days — everything *written* in Basic can at once be understood by any foreign

reader. With a proper system of training and the necessary phonograph records, this may take a week. To speak or write needs further practice in sentence formation — say a month in all. This reduces the usual four years by about ninety-seven per cent.

In short, by devoting less than one per cent of the average elementary school curriculum to Basic English in all countries, the problem of a universal language would be solved. If compulsory military training has been allowed for over a century to claim three years of every man's life in so many civilized countries, three weeks may not be found too much for the uncivilized to devote to creative peace before another century has passed.



Drawing by Johan Bull

From "*The Satyricon*"
by **PETRONIUS**

A MATRON in Ephesus was of such notable chastity that women came from miles around to gaze on her. So, naturally, when her husband was buried she was not satisfied by the popular fashion of following a corpse with streaming hair, and beating the naked breast in front of the crowd: she went with the dead man into his very tomb, an underground sepulcher in the Greek style, and settled down to watch and weep day and night.

Her parents and other relations could not divert her from tormenting herself, or from leaving herself to die of hunger; the government officials finally went away discouraged, and she dragged through her fifth day without food, mourned by everyone as the unique example for womankind. A faithful maid sat beside the miserable lady, wept just the proper number of tears with her, and kept the light in the tomb burning. Only this one tale went the rounds in

Done into Basic English
by **L. W. LOCKHART**

THERE WAS a woman of Ephesus so noted as an example of true married love that other women came from miles round to see her. So naturally, on the death of her loved one, it was not enough for her to do only as others would have done: go after the dead with hair hanging loose, beating herself in public view. She went with the dead man into the death place itself, a stone room under the earth such as the Greeks made, and seating herself at his side, gave herself up to crying, day and night.

Her father and mother and other relations made every attempt to keep her from the pain she was causing herself, and from the death that would before long overtake her through need of food, but she would not be turned from her purpose. In the end the government authorities went away unable to do anything, and slowly she got through her fifth day without food, regretted by every one as an example to all her sex, a woman without parallel. A servant