Philip Sletherby settled himself down in an almost empty railway carriage, with the pleasant feeling of starting off on an agreeable and profitable trip. He was bound for Brill Manor, the country residence of his new acquaintance, Mrs Saltpen-Jago. Honoria Saltpen-Jago was a person of some social importance in London, of considerable importance and influence in the county of Chalkshire. The county of Chalkshire was of immediate personal interest to Philip Sletherby; it was held for the Government in the present Parliament by a gentleman who did not intend to seek re-election, and Sletherby was under serious consideration by the party managers as his possible successor. The Saltpen-Jago influence was not an item which could be left out of consideration, and Philip Sletherby had been delighted at meeting Honoria at a small and friendly luncheon-party, still more gratified when she had asked him down to her country house for the following Friday-to-Tuesday. He was obviously ‘on approval’, and if he could secure the goodwill of his hostess he might count on the nomination as an assured thing. If he failed to find favour in her eyes—well, the local leaders would probably cool off in their early enthusiasm for him.

Among the passengers dotted about on the platform, awaiting their respective trains, Sletherby spotted a club acquaintance, and beckoned him up to the carriage-window for a chat.

‘Oh, you’re staying with Mrs Saltpen-Jago for the weekend, are you? I expect you’ll have a good time; she has the reputation of being an excellent hostess. She’ll be useful to you, too, if that Parliamentary project—hullo, you’re off. Goodbye.’

Sletherby waved goodbye to his friend, pulled up the window, and turned his attention to the magazine lying on his lap. He had scarcely glanced at a couple of pages, however, when a smothered curse caused him to glance hastily at the only other occupant of the carriage. His travelling companion was a young man of about twenty-two, with dark hair, fresh complexion, and the blend of smartness and disarray that is typical of a rambler. He was searching furiously and ineffectually for some elusive or non-existent object; from time to time he dug a six-penny coin out of a waistcoat pocket and stared at it ruefully, then recommenced the futile searching operations. A cigarette-case, matchbox, key, silver pencil case and railway ticket were turned out on to
the seat beside him, but none of these articles seemed to afford him satisfaction; he cursed again, rather louder than before.

The vigorous pantomime did not draw forth any remark from Sletherby, who resumed his scrutiny of the magazine.

"I say!" exclaimed a young voice presently, "didn't I hear you say you were going down to stay with Mrs Saltpen-Jago at Brill Manor? What a coincidence! My mother, you know. I'm coming there on Monday evening, so we shall meet. I'm quite a stranger; haven't seen mother for six months at least. I was away yachting last time she was in Town. I'm Bertie, the second son, you know. I say, it's an awfully lucky coincidence that I should run across someone who knows my mother just at this particular moment. I've done an awfully awkward thing."

"You've lost something, haven't you?" said Sletherby.

"Not exactly, but left behind, which is almost as bad; just as inconvenient, anyway. I've come away without my coin-purse, with four quid in it, all my worldly wealth for the moment. It was in my pocket all right, just before I was starting, and then I wanted to seal a letter, and the coin-purse happens to have my crest on it, so I whipped it out to stamp the seal with, and, like an idiot, I must have left it on the table. I should have put it back! I had some change loose in my pocket, but after I'd paid for a taxi and my ticket I'd only got this little sixpence left. I'm stopping at a little country inn near Brondquay for three days' fishing; not a soul knows me there, and my weekend bill, and tips, and cab to and from the station, and my ticket on to Brill, that will mount up to two or three quid, won't it? If you wouldn't mind lending me two pound ten, or three for preference, I shall be awfully obliged. It will pull me out of a hole."

"I think I can manage that," said Sletherby, after a moment's hesitation.

"Thanks awfully. It's jolly good of you. What a lucky thing for me that I should have chanced across one of mother's friends. It will be a lesson to me not to leave my purse lying about anywhere, when it ought to be in my pocket. I suppose the moral of the whole thing is don't try and convert things to purposes for which they weren't intended. Still, when a coin-purse has your crest on it—"

"What is your crest, by the way?" Sletherby asked, carelessly.

"Not a very common one," said the youth; "a demi-lion holding a cross-croslet in its paw."

"When your mother wrote to me, giving me a list of trains, she had, if I remember rightly, a running greyhound on her notepaper,"
observed Sletherby. There was a tinge of coldness in his voice.

‘That is the Jago crest,’ responded the youth promptly; ‘the demi-lion is the Saltpen crest. We have the right to use both, but I always use the demi-lion, because, after all, we are really Saltpens.’

There was silence for a moment or two, and the young man began to collect his fishing tackle and other belongings from the rack.

‘My station is the next one,’ he announced.

‘I’ve never met your mother,’ said Sletherby suddenly, ‘though we’ve corresponded several times. My introduction to her was through political friends. Does she resemble you at all in feature? I should rather like to be able to pick her out if she happened to be on the platform to meet me.’

‘She’s supposed to be like me. She has the same dark brown hair and high colour; it runs in her family. I say, this is where I get out.’

‘Goodbye,’ said Sletherby.

‘You’ve forgotten the three quid,’ said the young man, opening the carriage-door and pitching his suitcase on to the platform.

‘I’ve no intention of lending you three pounds, or three shillings,’ said Sletherby severely.

‘But you said—’

‘I know I did. My suspicions hadn’t been roused then, though I hadn’t necessarily swallowed your story. The error about the crests put me on my guard, notwithstanding the really brilliant way in which you accounted for it. Then I laid a trap for you; I told you that I had never met Mrs Saltpen-Jago. As a matter of fact I met her at lunch on Monday last. She is a pronounced blonde.’

The train moved on, leaving the so-called son of the Saltpen-Jago family cursing furiously on the platform.

‘Well, he hasn’t opened his fishing expedition by catching a flat,’ chuckled Sletherby. He would have an entertaining story to recount at dinner that evening, and his clever little trap would earn him applause as a man of resource and astuteness. He was still telling his adventure in imagination to an attentive audience of dinner guests when the train drew up at his destination. On the platform he was greeted sedately by a tall footman, and noisily by Claude People, an important lawyer, who had apparently travelled down by the same train.

‘Hullo, Sletherby! You spending the weekend at Brill? Good. Excellent. We’ll have a round of golf together tomorrow. Ah, here we are; here’s the car waiting for us, and very nice, too!’

The car which won Claude People’s approval was a sumptuous-looking vehicle, which seemed to embody the last word in elegance, comfort, and locomotive power. Its graceful lines and symmetrical design masked the fact that it was an enormous wheeled structure, combining the features of a hotel lounge and an engine-room.

‘Different sort of vehicle to the horse-drawn carriage in which our grandfathers used to travel, eh?’ exclaimed the lawyer appreciatively. And for Sletherby’s benefit he began running over the chief points of perfection in the fitting and mechanism of the car.
flowed from him in an uninterrupted stream as the car sped along the country roads. Just as the car turned in at the Brill entrance gates, Claude People captured Sletterby's attention by switching his remarks to the personality of their hostess.

'Brilliant woman, level-headed, a clear thinker, knows exactly when to take up an individual or a cause, exactly when to let him or it drop. Influential woman, I wouldn't dare upset her, but too restless. No repose. Good appearance, too, till she made that idiotic change.'

'Change?' queried Sletterby, 'what change?'

'What change? You don't mean to say—Oh, of course, you've only known her just lately. She used to have beautiful dark brown hair, which went very well with her fresh complexion; then one day, about five weeks go, she electrified everybody by appearing as a brilliant blonde. Quite ruined her looks. Here we are. I say, what's the matter with you? You look rather ill.'

Saki

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Hector Hugh Munro (1870–1916) wrote under the pseudonym of Saki. He was a novelist and short story writer born in Myanmar (then known as Burma) and educated in England. He joined the police force in Burma in 1893, and returned to England in 1896, to work as a newspaper reporter and foreign correspondent. In 1914, despite being over 40 years old, he volunteered for active service in World War I, and was killed on the Western Front.

Saki is best known for his many varied short stories. He had a highly individual style, and his humorous, satiric, supernatural and macabre stories are full of eccentric wit and unconventional situations.
WORDS TO KNOW

acquaintance  a person one knows slightly rather than a close friend
agreeable  pleasing
astuteness  cleverness
awfully  very (informal, colloquial)
cross-croslet  a symbol in the shape of a cross used on coats of arms
demi-lion  a symbol of the top half of a lion used on coats of arms
disarray  untidy and disorganized
elusive  difficult to find
expounded  explained in detail
futile  pointless
gratified  pleased
ineffectually  not producing the desired effect
nomination  putting forward a candidate for election
obliged  to be indebted or grateful
pantomime  a dramatic entertainment with exaggerated characters and actions
quid  slang term for British pound sterling
rambler  a hiker
recommenced  began again
ruefully  sorrowfully or pitifully

COMPREHENSION

1. Answer the following questions.
   a. What position does Philip Sletterby hope to get?
   b. Who is Philip Sletterby on his way to visit? Why?
   c. What is meant by ‘on approval’?
   d. How does Bertie know that Philip Sletterby is going to visit Bertie’s mother?
   e. Where is Bertie going?
   f. What are the six items Bertie has in his pockets?
   g. What has Bertie forgotten and what does he want Philip Sletterby to do?
   h. What are the two reasons why Philip Sletterby does not help Bertie?

These questions are more difficult. Discuss them first.

   i. Who is the other man travelling to Brill Manor and what are three things we learn about him?
   j. Which part or parts of the story show us that Philip Sletterby thinks highly of himself?
   k. Which parts of the story show us that it was written and is set in the past?

2. Answer the following questions with reference to context.
   a. Philip Sletterby settled himself down in an almost empty railway carriage, with the pleasant feeling of starting off on an agreeable and profitable trip.
      i. Explain which word best describes how this character is feeling?
         irritated  smug  embarrassed
      ii. How does he feel at the end of the story?
      iii. How does he hope to profit from the trip?
b. There was a tinge of coldness in his voice.
   i. What does the statement mean?
   ii. Who is this describing?
   iii. Why does he feel as he does?

c. The train moved on, leaving the so-called son of the Saltpen-Jago family cursing furiously on the platform.
   i. Whose perspective is being expressed here?
   ii. What is meant by ‘so-called’?
   iii. Why is Bertie ‘cursing furiously’?

WORKING WITH WORDS

1. If you go through the passage carefully, you will find all the adverbs (started but not completed) below. Find them in the passage and notice the way in which they are used. Which verbs do they describe? When you have completed the words below use them in sentences of your own.

   a. sed.................. b. noi.................. c. furi.................. (twice)
   d. prom................ e. carel................ f. scarc................
   g. rue.................. h. ineff................ i. hast..................
   j. righ................ k. pres................ l. seve.................

2. Copy the following sentence in your notebook.

   He was searching furiously and ineffectually for some elusive or non-existent object; from time to time he dug a six-penny coin out of a waistcoat pocket and stared at it ruefully, then recommenced the futile searching operations.

   Saki’s vocabulary builds a very detailed image of the young man’s movements and character.

   a. Underline the four verbs in the sentence. The first one (a verb phrase) has been done for you.

   b. The story contains many words to do with looking. Here is a list of these words and a couple that do not appear in the story. Use them in sentences of your own.

      scrutinized      espied              picked out      stared
      searched        spotted             saw            looked
      glanced         observed            fixed eyes on

   c. Look at the first paragraph of the story. Find words and phrases that describe Philip Sletherby’s feeling of contentment.

      p................ f................ a................ g................ d................

   d. Use a thesaurus to find more words that mean the same as pleased.
SLANG AND COLLOQUIALISMS
Slang is the use of informal words and expressions. These are not considered standard in the language. Slang is often associated with unrefined speech and behaviour, and therefore considered vulgar. Such words should be avoided in formal writing.

When the young Bertie Saltten-Jago says that he has forgotten his purse ‘with four quid in it’ he is using slang. What slang do you use when talking to your friends?

Colloquialisms are expressions in which certain words are used in a way that does not correspond to their real meaning. Colloquialisms are used in conversation, rather than in written English. In Saki’s story Bertie says ‘it’s an awfully lucky coincidence’. If you look up the word ‘awfully’ in a dictionary you will see it has two quite different meanings, one of which is used colloquially, as in the example.

3. Can you use the following in two ways to bring out their different meanings?
   a. horribly
   b. terribly
   c. frightfully
   d. pretty

LEARNING ABOUT LANGUAGE

AUXILIARY VERBS

1. Can you explain the meaning of each sentence in A and B?
   A. i. How would they feel, he wondered?
      ii. How should they feel, he wondered?
      iii. How ought they to feel, he wondered?
      iv. How must they feel, he wondered?
      v. How might they feel, he wondered?
   B. i. The train could be on time.
      ii. The train should be on time.
      iii. The train ought to be on time.
      iv. The train must be on time.
      v. The train might be on time.

2. Now look at the following sentences.
   ‘It ought to be in my pocket.’ Said Bertie.
   ‘I oughtn’t to let . . .’

Ought is usually followed by a to-infinitive.
Examples: ought to go, ought to eat, ought to see, etc.

In the negative ought is followed by not and can be shortened to oughtn’t to.
I oughtn’t to give him any money.
In a question we put the word ought in front of the subject:
Ought he to believe the young man?

Ought to expresses three things.

i. Duty or moral obligation
   We ought to help those people who are old and sick.
   The ministers felt they ought to go to their colleague’s funeral.

ii. Probability or supposition
    He left Delhi yesterday, so he ought to be here tomorrow.

iii. Advisability or desirability
     You ought to buy new tyres for your car; you may have an accident.
     There ought to be more goods available in this shop; it is supposed to be a supermarket.

3. Make up interesting sentences of your own using the following.
   a. ought to feel                  b. ought to go                  c. ought to write
      d. ought to have been            e. oughtn’t to hear            f. ought he to
      g. ought to know                 h. oughtn’t to play            i. ought they to return

ELLIPSIS

Study this sentence:
It stopped, (it) slid, (it) went down almost to the bottom.

In English we often leave out words (especially in conversation), when the meaning is understood from the context or from general knowledge.

Examples: The baby was drinking milk, the mother tea.
   The baby was drinking milk, the mother (was drinking) tea.
   This is my new blue cycle. I bought it and then wished I hadn’t.
   This is my new blue cycle. I bought it and then (I) wished I hadn’t (bought it).

When using ellipses, the understood part of the verb must be the same as the expressed part. A singular verb cannot be made to do the service for an understood verb that is plural.

Examples: His day was long and his hobbies many. (wrong)
   His days were long and his hobbies (were) many. (correct)
   His day was long and his hobbies were many. (correct)

4. Find the mistakes in the following and correct them.
   a. I am going to the market but Meera not.
   b. You are working hard but not your friend.
   c. Sita is having roast chicken but the others vegetable curry.
   d. Drawing and writing are good skills to learn, but scrawling not so good.
   e. Chennai has been marked on the map but Rajapuram, Dinanagar and Pratappet left off.

5. Find three examples of ellipsis in the story.
'Influential woman, but spoils herself and her chances by being too restless. No repose. Good appearance, too, till she made that idiotic change.'

'Change?' queried Sletherby, 'what change?'

What was Philip's question to Claude?

'What change?'

The full meaning of this sentence is: 'What change (has the woman made to her appearance)︖'

Note that we don’t have to use all the words of the speaker when giving an answer; we may leave out some words, so long as the meaning and the context is clear.

1. **Work in pairs, and read the following conversation. Provide your own short answers or comments in the blanks.**

   A. It’s going to be a long, hot summer.
   B. Yes, ....................
   A. I am going to try and go up to the hills.
   B. So, ....................
   A. I have been to Ooty and to Darjeeling, but never to Nainital.
   B. Nor ..................... I’d love to go there some day.
   A. So ....................
   B. I’ve heard that it is a wonderful place for a holiday.
   A. So ..................... I read an article about it in the paper last week.
   B. Yes, .................... It was a wonderful article, with photographs.
   A. Yes, .................... I enjoyed reading it, and am looking forward to seeing the place.
   B. So ..................... It might be a good idea to plan a trip there together some day.
   A. It certainly ................
   B. Let’s do that.

2. **When you have finished adding comments, read out the statements as a dialogue. Check that your responses are correct!**

**COMPOSITION**

As Philip Sletherby or Bertie, write a letter to your friend telling him/her about the meeting on the train. Philip probably felt annoyed with himself and/or embarrassed whereas Bertie probably felt angry or confused. Try to convey your strong feelings about the meeting as clearly as possible.