

Go with the spiritual life, the higher volition and action,
With the great girdle of God, go and encompass the earth.

Go; say not in thy heart. And what then were it accomplished,
Were the wild impulse allayed, what were the use or the good!
Go, when the instinct is stilled, and when the deed is accom-
plished,

What thou hast done and shalt do shall be declared to thee
then.

Go with the sun and the stars, and yet evermore in thy spirit
Say to thyself: It is good; yet is there better than it.
This that I see is not all, and this that I do is but little;
Nevertheless it is good, though there is better than it.

It is the spirit of youth which breathes in these impressive lines and gives them a tonic quality. At a time when so much diseased and cowardly thought finds its record in verse, it seems almost a duty to recall the large and hopeful utterance of a sane and healthy nature, in full sympathy with the time, and often in genuine anguish of spirit because of it, and yet serene and aspiring to the very end.

H. W. M.



Is "American Humor" Humorous?

By Oscar Fay Adams

That, of course, depends upon what is understood as humor. In some country districts grinning through a horse-collar is esteemed vastly amusing, and the individual performing this function may claim to have, in sooth, a pretty wit, without much gainsaying. Some there are who find excellent food for mirth in putting out a leg over which the unheeding may stumble and fall, and who discern humor of the rarest flavor in the roughest practical jokes and the most brutal sexual allusions. The sensibilities of one half of mankind are attuned to humor of this pitch, and from it to the delicate, subtle humor of a Hawthorne are infinite upward gradations.

Without going into the question of the distinction existing between wit and humor, and speaking now only of American humor, we perceive at first sight two distinct divisions of the subject. In the first of these may be classed what may be defined as literary humor—the humor of Lowell, Hawthorne, Curtis, Irving, and many more of lesser rank. The humor of these men belongs to the domain of pure literature, and is not distinctively American. In the second classification belongs the humor that is ranked as essentially American, both by ourselves and those of other nations, and it is this of which I wish to speak. It is the humor of the comic papers, of the funny columns of papers that are not professedly comic, and of comic books that make no pretense to be considered as literature, that is here under discussion. This kind of American humor has a thousand readers where that of the other class would scarcely find ten. Is it humor, on the whole? Let us see.

However widely any company of refined men and women might differ upon general topics, we may safely affirm that in regard to this matter no one of them would see any humor at all in making sport of tragic events or in levity in the face of disaster. Not one of them would delight in holding up to general ridicule the possibly Jewish profile of one neighbor or the large mouth and irregular teeth of another. Nor would any of them consider a wretched besotted drunkard as an amusing spectacle, an adroit thief as a high comedian, or regard adultery in the light of a screaming farce. Being what they are, refined men and women, they would utterly fail to see the humor of these things.

But are they competent judges of what constitutes humor? Apparently not, from some points of view. A book like "Peck's Bad Boy" brings its author fame and fortune. And what do we find in its vastly amusing pages? What but the vulgarest conception of family life ever penned? A father of low tastes and shaky morals, and a keen-witted son who is no stranger to his father's dissipations, whether that estimable parent be the worse for liquor or regardless of obligations to his wife. The

boy is not ashamed of his parent, and his own cleverness is made much of.

Not so long ago a series of humorous articles were widely circulated in the newspapers, having for their topic the home life of Mr. and Mrs. Spoopendyke. The wife was represented as an inane individual whose remarks were constantly goading her husband to frenzy and bringing down upon her head a string of objurgations, among which "dod-gasted idiot" was the least objectionable. Many articles of a similar character have been widely read, as these were, and are usually classed as American "domestic humor." Heaven help the domesticity where this kind of humor prevails!

Humor of another kind is exhibited in the columns of police-court news, where too often the waifs and strays of weakness and crime are held up to be laughed at. To the refined mind a miserable drunkard receiving his sentence is not a mirth-inspiring object in himself; but the reporter knows better, and labors to the end that we shall agree with him. Sometimes we find in our morning newspaper an account of a robbery or marital infelicity concisely told and without sensationalism; but, lest the reader should fail to perceive the inherent humor of the situation, a humorously sensational heading is given to the item.

The American is fond of attributing to the Englishman a defective humorous sense, and calls "Punch" the center of gravity. Doubtless the Englishman is dense in these matters. He picks up an American newspaper and reads something to this effect:

"James Kelly attempted to adapt a powder-magazine to the uses of an after-dinner smoking-room the other day. Coroner's inquests were held in five different counties."

"Do you call that funny?" he asks. "I call it horrible."

When the American explains that such a thing never really happened, or at least that this particular incident never did, the Englishman is still unappeased. The joke, if there be one, is not apparent to him. Nor does the average Englishman see any large amount of humor in the jealousies, real or imagined, existing between American municipalities as manifested in allusions to the big feet of Chicago women, the flapping ears of the people of St. Louis, the baked beans of Boston, or the deadness of Philadelphia. It all appears like very stupid banter to him, and he wonders that we do not tire of harping on such things. But no, we are not a dense, thick-headed race, and these things amuse us mightily! Our sense of humor is so keen that custom never stales the infinite variety of jests upon such fertile themes! So, too, with persistent regularity one may find in the comic and other papers the ever-delightful jest that has, in more or less offensive fashion, the Hebrew for its theme, or caricatures pitilessly aimed at certain facial peculiarities of the laboring Irishman. Add to these topics the perennially fresh remarks about the fondness of the goat for tomato-cans, the observations of the small boy to his sister's young man, the preference that lovers manifest for occupying one chair instead of two, and the facilities for divorce with their attendant consequences, and it is easily seen how wide a field American humor may cover.

Between the humor of literature—to return for a moment to our former classification—and American humor such as has just been alluded to, is the ephemeral humor that has for its subject the follies and pettinesses of men and women—a humor tipped with satire, that is often very effective, as the pages of "Life," perhaps, afford the best evidence. But is this the humor that most Americans prefer? Does "Life," for instance, circulate so generally in America as "Punch" in England? To the Englishman of education "Punch" is a necessity; "Pick-me-up" and "Tit-Bits" he may now and then glance at, but "Ally Sloper" he never sees. The average American, who considers his English cousin quite out of the running where humor is concerned, stirs the fountains of his mirth with "Puck," "Judge" (I am not now considering the admirable political service which these journals have performed, but am speaking of them simply as papers furnishing distinctively American humor), and inferior papers of the "Ally Sloper" grade, while

"Life," which in some respects corresponds to "Punch," he, comparatively speaking, less seldom sees. And for the rest, the "domestic humor" of the daily papers suffices him. Transplant the educated Englishman to America, and if he could not get "Punch" he would read "Life" as a substitute more or less satisfactory; transplant the average intelligent American to England, and instead of "Punch" you would find him reading certain comic journals whose wit is based on lines that are sadly familiar here, and quite possibly descending to the still lower depths of the "Pink 'Un" and "Ally Sloper."

Now, as no man habitually seeks that corner of the club-room or hotel smoking-room where stories of a salacious nature are the staple of entertainment, or, finding it by chance, remains there for any great length of time, *unless* the theme be to his taste, so no man reads steadily for his diversion the humor that he does not care for. We have already glanced at the themes which a company of refined men and women would fail to consider amusing, and yet it is upon just such themes that what we profess to call "American humor" is largely based.

The intelligent Englishman who has studied the subject cannot help feeling that what is known as American humor is for the most part the levity, the flippant bad taste, of a people to whom nothing in heaven or on earth is sacred, the humor that makes a mock of duty to the State and to individuals, that turns a somersault in the presence of the eternal verities, that vulgarizes the tenderest relations of life—all this does not seem like true humor to him. Now and then he expresses his thought, and we are tremendously hurt and indignant, and credit the adverse criticism to British prejudice and jealousy of our more active mental processes. "It always takes an Englishman a week to see a joke that the American catches before the last word is uttered," we cry.

But Englishmen could always see what was best in the fun of Artemus Ward, and what is genuine in American humor they have not been slow to appreciate. But the exaggerated, strained humor and sordid details of works of the Betsy Bobbett order, characteristics which obscure the better qualities beneath, they are not likely to care for; while as for the humor of the Bill Nye variety and other species of wit that we fondly call national, it is to them anathema.

"And so it is to us," refined American men and women add. Of course it is, because you *are* refined men and women; but how much weight does your opinion of the matter carry with it? Does not this American humor which you dislike so much become every year more popular? Are not an increasing number of columns devoted to it in the daily papers? Cannot each one of you point to one or more journals that ten years ago, let us say, would not have printed a column of "domestic humor" from one year's end to the other, that now publish it daily? And why? Simply because the demand for it increases.

Let us call things by their right names. Let us cease exclaiming about insular British prejudice and the Englishman's jealousy of American acuteness. Whether it is the Englishman or any one else who declares that what we are pleased to style "American humor" is very largely founded on a misapprehension of what constitutes legitimate food for mirth, he is right, and we know it. If we did not know it, his judgment would not hurt us as it does. American humor that is pitched in the key to which objection is here urged is spurious; it is *not* humorous in any real sense.

But it is "American"! Yes, and that is the pity of it. The wit and humor of a Lowell or an Irving are, in spite of local characteristics, that of the literary humorist wherever found; they belong to the world, and pass current everywhere without needing a label to define their quality. But to the United States also belongs the distinction of having brought forth a style of humor that substitutes flippancy and smartness for wit; that esteems nothing too high for its theme, as it considers nothing too low; that jests at scars, and runs riot among all the obligations of life.

And this is what our critics overseas call "American humor," and we dare not deny that it is our very own. Being our own, is it, then, our glory or our shame?

A Prodigal

An Irish Country Character-Sketch

By Katharine Tynan Hinkson

I did not know Jimmy Doran in the days before he became a prodigal. He made his great escapade quite twenty years ago, and prior to it had not come within my youthful knowledge. But I knew him after he returned, and before he became the melancholy old invalid he was in his latter days. I remember him, a brown, wizened old fellow, leading the goats to pasture. He was little and wrinkled, and would have been merry if he had not that cowed look which he never quite lost. I often came on him tooting sweetly on his tin whistle, and half lost in the music till the sound of a foot made him start apprehensively. He was not above making friends with a couple of children, goat or cattle herding, and sitting with them while they ate their bread and treacle and he nibbled the dry crust which was his only refreshment. He was well stored with the country tales and the superstitions of the fields—a pleasant old fellow to chat with for a while when one met him on one's afternoon walk. A favorite seat of his was by a holy well in a grassy *boreen*. The mossy bank shelved to the clear water over its polished pebbles. He used often to be sitting there when I came by, sometimes half dozing, at others feeding the birds that hopped about him with crumbs saved from his own scanty refec-tion. I thought he was not quite unlike a bird himself, he was so small and brown; and he had a quick, timid way of turning his little old head and twinkling eyes. The holy well was under a thorn-tree, which was hung with votive rags. The country people venerated it greatly, and would resent any animal's drinking at it. But then, as old Jimmy explained to me, that was all nonsense, and the blessed Brigid would be the last one to object to the innocent bastes, let alone that she was fond of the creatures in her lifetime. Jimmy was very learned in the lives of the saints. Anyhow, Jimmy never denied to any creature refreshment, though it were a weary-foot little cur which had found its way down from the dusty highroad, or sheep or kine going home from a fair, and turned into the lane for rest and pasture. He used to look like a little old tutelary spirit of the well, sitting there in the shade, of an evening, while the birds he had tamed drank at his feet, lifting their heads to swallow, in a bird's pretty way, and turning their fearless eyes on him where he sat.

He used to be abroad very late. Even in June the gloaming would find him unwillingly going homeward with his goats. He confided to me once that he couldn't see that a man wanted a better bed than the green sward, with the sky over him. He was by nature houseless and a wanderer. I don't know that he could have had a drop of gypsy blood, but he was essentially vagrant in the heart of him. If fate had dealt kindly with him he would have been a merry, gentle old peddler, trudging the grassy roads, pack on back. One could imagine how he would innocently wheedle matron and maid. The season seemed to affect his out-of-doors life little. The Irish climate is mild, and three-fourths of the winter through it is possible to sun one's self, sitting on the sheltered side of a ditch. For cold or wet evenings Jimmy was provided with a couple of sacks, given him by a kindly neighbor, which, thrown about his shoulders, kept out the rain and cold that his old blue *cothamor*, or coat with capes, would have let through. I often wonder that in those days he did not start off again on his rambles, while yet he was able, and before the rheumatism took him. But he did not, and I think it was less terror of his wife than love for his grandchild that kept him enduring his hard life.

To look at Jimmy when he was afield, you would scarcely imagine that he was a sort of perpetual penitent. Yet he was, just as much as if he wore a white sheet instead of his *cothamor*. His little grandchild, Lizzie, never dared do more than give him a furtive hug when her grandmother's back was turned. There was a consensus of opinion among the neighbors that Mrs. Doran was a bitter pill, "an' tr'ated th'ould man scandalous;" but though they