

The BOWLING GREEN

The Folder

ODDS and ends of anecdote about Charles M. Barras, author of "The Black Crook," have been drifting to us in the mail. The following letter arrives from Chicago:—

As a collector of American humor I have found a few scraps about Charles M. Barras, author of the old play "The Black Crook."

Barras was one of those lesser lights in early American humor soon eclipsed by Artemus Ward. In 1855-6 Barras was a Cincinnati newspaper man, presumably on the *Commercial*, and acted also as the Cincinnati correspondent of the New York *Spirit of the Times*, the leading sporting-humorous weekly of the decade. My information is taken from the files of the *Spirit*, which forms a part of my collection of early American humor.

Barras was particularly fond of perpetrating literary hoaxes on Cincinnati editors by mailing pseudonymous letters from towns near-by, in the manner of the Artemus Ward showman letters soon to appear in the Cleveland P. D. Over the pseudonym "Adolphus Logfellow Muggins" he wrote much humorous verse, hitting at the follies of the day, including a parody on "Hiawatha." To the *Spirit* Barras wrote letters, newsy sketches always in the light humorous sporting vein of doings of the "b'hoys" about Cincinnati.

Here's the story of how "Muggins" became actor and tried his hand at play writing (*Spirit of the Times*, 1855, p. 487, in a letter from Cincinnati):

"In the height of cold weather last winter when the poor were suffering from intense cold and hunger a project was set on foot to get up an amateur Dramatic Festival the proceeds to be appropriated to the suffering poor. A number of our most prominent citizens volunteered, among them our friend 'Charley.' The night came, the house was crammed in every corner (the receipts \$5,000). Never was a better entertainment offered by amateurs. Every one played his part well, but general acclamation divided the honors between Mr. Charles Anderson, who played Hamlet most excellently, and Mr. Charles M. Barras, who played Sir Edward Mortimer in the library scene in 'The Iron Chest,' and afterwards gave some imitations, among others a wandering Swiss girl with her organ and dogs. Charley was called before the curtain and his extempore speech was the feature of the night. . . . Well, Charley went home, went to bed, 'to sleep, perchance to dream'. . . . Got up next morning, dreamed all that day and all that week that he was acting. A few weeks afterward a friend was taken very ill; his life despaired of. Charley repaired to his bedside and never left it day or night, but for a few moments at a time. While his friend slept Barras would pick up any little scraps of paper that came his way and scribble them over. After a while his thoughts began to take a design, and his scribbles to assume a shape (the idea suggested by seeing the different kinds of medicine on the table). By the time his friend was out of danger, 'Muggins' had written a comedieta and called it 'The Hypochondriac.' A few days afterwards he spoke of it to Bates. Bates wanted to read the manuscript, was delighted with it, wanted it. But who was to play it? He had no one who he thought could do it justice. A thought struck Charley; he remembered the footlights, the paper crowns, the big swords, and all that sort of thing. He'd play it himself—just what Bates wanted. Next day there was announced in big letters on the bills a new farce by C. M. Barras, esq., principal part, Mr. Vertigo Morbid, by the author. Night came, the house was full. Mr. Barras appeared for the second time in his life before a public assemblage; he was received with deafening appeals of welcome and he kept the audience in a continual roar of laughter from the commencement of the piece till the fall of the curtain. . . ."

Here follows the story of the success of the piece on the road; then another story how Barras "sold" Barnum at "half-price," and as the correspondent ("Larkin") suggests Barnum did not often get the worst of it.

It would be interesting to know if Barras and Artemus Ward knew each other. That is not unlikely, as Ward was at that time in the vicinity of Cincinnati.

I am especially interested in the period 1830-60 and shall be glad to hear from persons interested in American humor, particularly of this period.

FRANKLIN J. MEINE.

1422 N. La Salle Street, Chicago.

We felt sure that sooner or later "The Cradle of the Deep" by Joan Lowell would become a subject of controversy. Alfred Loomis, well known yachtsman and deep water sailor, writes to our Maritime Department as follows:—

I can gen'ally take my sea literature as I find it, but when the Book of the Month Club, William McFee, Captain Riesenbergs, and Simon & Schuster endorse a book I tackle it with a suspicious eye for the very reason that I know I shouldn't.

"The Cradle of the Deep" is what I'm animadverting against.

I don't go so far as to claim that Miss Joan Lowell's story is synthetic, but I do claim that for a gal who lived thirteen or sixteen years (she claims both periods) on a sailing ship she knows precious little about seamanship or navigation. In the matter of navigation she says on page 167 that "By latitude and longitude I can locate a spot on the ocean as accurately as a landlubber can find 42nd Street and

Broadway." In the same paragraph she allows that she looked up Pitcairn Island on the chart and found it in Latitude 23 degrees S. and Longitude 120 degrees W. The lamentable fact (which I have verified from Bowditch) is that Pitcairn is in Latitude 25 degrees S. and Longitude 130 degrees W. On the preceding page, having given her position as 300 miles southeast of New Zealand, Miss Lowell quotes her father as saying, "We'll sail due East, Mr. Swanson, and try and make Pitcairn." And lo and behold they did make it. But if they had really sailed due East they'd have gone some 2000 miles and passed 1500 miles south of Pitcairn Island. Perhaps in telling her story the lady had in mind Bounty Island, which I see from the chart is not far from the coast of New Zealand.

In the matter of seamanship I would ask someone who knows more about sailing than I do to parse the passage on page 60 beginning "I heard the topsails aloft begin to flap," and ending "With a slapping crash the boom went over to the port tack." The best I can make of the maneuver described between those two sentences is that the ship jibed while in stays. If jibing while in stays isn't a lost art I want to learn it.

And now I come to the chapter about the water spout which might have been written by a ghost-writer who had never seen a schooner. It is a dull tropic afternoon when Father sights a water spout. He orders in the fore, main, and mizzen, but leaves the spanker standing. This is contrary to the usual custom, since the spanker, which is the largest sail, is taken in first. Father also tells the crew to "Sheet in the jibs," but I find that instead of sheeting them they take them in. Perhaps that is what is meant. After that the wind begins to hum viciously from leeward. That direction thereupon becomes to windward—but the lady continues to speak of it as "to leeward." Father orders his daughter to "Pull in the tackle." She knew what he meant and grabbed "half of the spanker boom tackle and tried to sheet in its slack." (Which half? What does she mean?) The excitement grows intense. "Still the ship went forward, the current and wind taking us ahead at the rate of two knots an hour with no sails up, except the truant spanker." (It is a fact that with only the spanker set the ship would be heading into the wind. If she moved at all she would be going stern first.) At this time Swede was lashing down the main boom. (What for?) More excitement. Then on page 182 Father did a thing that no sane navigator would do under ordinary conditions and threw the ship into the belly of the swells. (Where did the sails come from in the twinkling of an eye? How could father swing the ship with no sail set but the spanker? What is the "belly" of a swell? Why did Father want to swing the ship at all if it was his intention to lower the spanker?) Page 183, a description (I suppose) of the spanker sheet, is too fantastic for criticism, being a pure flight of imaginative art; but on page 184 Father orders his harried crew to chop away the jaws of the spanker boom. When, I ask, did a boom have jaws? If it had them what good would it do to chop them away? Fortunately Nelson had found his way back along the boom, holding on to the leachings of the sail. (Leachings is a word not included in my nautical dictionary. If the leach of the sail is meant I am amazed that he was able to find his way along the boom while holding on to the leach.) By herculean efforts the nonexistent jaws of the boom were hacked away and the boom fell into the sea, but still the ship went forward. (Or backward.) How much simpler it would have been if Father instead of ordering this complicated maneuver had let go the halliards and lowered the sail! But then Father got his rifle after lashing the wheel. (Why bother to lash it when all the sails were by this time taken in, sheeted home, or dropped overboard? If, that is, the spanker did go overboard with the boom.) And then he shoots the spout and BUSTS IT WITH A RIFLE!

Well, well, well. Why all the commotion sheeting in jibs, getting men's elbows caught between the couplings of the freight cars, and attacking the spars with crowbars (which are such useful implements on prairie schooners) if a few shots from a rifle will dissipate a water spout?

I ask you these questions, Chris, because I have been writing to your Marine Department for nearly ten years, and because you know how anxious I am to learn about that old Debbil the sea. If you haven't the time to answer them, will you kindly put me in touch with Dr. Traprock?

ALFRED F. LOOMIS.

Some day, I hope, there may be opportunity to write at length about the ardors and endurances behind the recent opening of "The Black Crook." Perhaps there was an unanticipated omen in the painting of the hour glasses (symbolic of the Three Hours for Lunch Club) on each side of the proscenium at the old Lyric Theatre. It struck me as odd that none of the critics who commented on the length of the piece were struck by the humor of those six hour-glasses. The curtain went up at 9.10, and fell at 1.35. Even so, the original running time of the iridescent old spectacle was beaten by better than an hour; for the Niblo's Garden opening in 1866 went from 7.45 to 1.15. Let me add that having satisfied themselves by playing it once exactly as done in 1866, the Young Producers have cut it to normal running time (8.30 to 11.15). But they wanted to show that the Theatre Guild is not the only outfit that can produce a show 4½ hours long.

That opening night will not soon be forgotten. Those who had to leave did so, reluctantly, towards midnight. Patrons from upstairs came down and filled the gaps. The congregation of the faithful began to realize that something rather amusingly memorable was happening; the final hour was more enthusiastic than any preceding part of the evening. About 2 o'clock the cheerful throng had distributed

itself in neighboring hostelrys for coffee and scrambled eggs and dancing. It was 5 in the morning before the last echoes of The Black Crook had died away from Hoboken. I think Mr. Barras would have been pleased. I wish he had lived long enough to see Ta ra ra Boomdeay!

Of the excitements and fatigues preceding the show there is not yet time to speak—of the anxieties of building the trap-doors; how Miss Cox, who plays Stalacta, fell asleep standing up at one of the final rehearsals after long waiting in the cellar for the trap-door to be finished (she dared not sit down for fear of wrinkling the famous tights)—how the chorus slept in the boxes during the final days of rehearsal—how the head carpenter, after three nights continuous work, passed into nescience tools still in hand, and was covered with a sheet and garlands by his colleagues and lay in state like a Roman emperor; how one of the managers, taking a bath to revive himself just before the opening, fell asleep in the tub and was nearly drowned—these are just hasty memoranda of a matter that must some day be discussed in the tender backward of time.

CHRISTOPHER MORLEY.

The Aging Radical

SOUVENIR. By FLOYD DELL. New York: Doubleday, Doran & Co. 1929.

Reviewed by JOHN CARTER

FLOYD DELL writes well, and—like the rest of us—writes best when writing about himself. His latest novel is tinged with so strong a flavor of autobiography—though no doubt the material has been "arranged" so as to avoid hurt feelings and direct confessions—that it must be ranked among his best writings. In it he summons up those snows of yesteryear, the radicalism of pre-Volsteadian Greenwich Village, and distills some acrid philosophy from their ghostly flakes.

His novel deals with Felix Fay, a radical young newspaperman from Chicago who had come to New York to write a play, and had, instead, been divorced by his first wife. Deprived of the comforts of matrimony, and bereft of his son who remains with his mother, Felix had written a series of successful plays. He had married again and had moved to Connecticut, where he begat two daughters and wrote plays and was a pillar of suburban society. Then he happened to meet the mother of his son, who decided that it was time for Felix and Prentiss to see something of each other. The rest of Mr. Dell's novel concerns itself with the experiences and reactions of young Prentiss, who is no Utopian idealist, but bourgeois, and who very self-consciously goes and settles in the Village, that world of "simplicity, bravery, and sincerity," and prepares to be the "complete radical."

Mr. Dell has handled his theme effectively and, in the course of a polite comedy of manners and morals, has contrived to set forth a few shrewd aperçus on life and sex. "The trouble," he says, "with inventing a new and purely personal morality is that it gets so damn' complicated. The traditional morality is simpler—if one can stick to it." And we all owe him our thanks for letting one of his characters warn us as to the meaning of companionate marriage—or should one say, multilateral matrimony?

I tell you, companionate marriage is a trap, intended to lure young men into fatherhood. Listen! They are young, enjoying their freedom, not at all inclined to settle down to the job of being a husband. So they are told "You need not support the girl—she will keep on working. There will be no babies for a long time—none, if you don't want them. In fact," he is told, "this is not a real marriage at all. The gate remains open—you can walk out whenever you wish. Why not come in and see how you like it?" So the deluded young man comes in. And—all that is necessary to turn this modern arrangement into the most old-fashioned marriage is—what? For the girl to find that she is going to have a baby after all. Watch and see—that is what will happen. It is a trap, I tell you, invented by bourgeois moralists. It seems very modern, very advanced—but in ten years the preachers and the women's clubs will all be for it!

There is nothing in "Souvenir" to shock the most fastidious. It is what is called a "clean book." Floyd Dell thinks clearly and writes without self-consciousness. What he has to say is not over-profound, but it is perfectly true, and the whole is savored with that precious salt of radical inquiry which turns what would have been a tragedy to Mr. Harold Bell Wright, into a calmly ironic study of the aging radical, face to face with his youth.



Beyond Physics

“ENOUGH of this talk about monkeys and species; let us get down to fundamentals, to things that really matter.” It was with some such words as these that in 1865 the Scotchman, Hutcheson Sterling, a fundamentalist in philosophy, prefaced his book on “The Secret of Hegel.” The work was designed to stem the rising tide of evolutionary materialism; and it succeeded to the extent that it introduced German idealism into the universities of Scotland and England and afforded a rallying point against Darwinism for philosophers and theologians.

And now nearly two thirds of a century later we are confronted with a somewhat analogous situation. Huxley and the bishops are dead, but John Watson and the parsons of Tennessee and Arkansas are living and lively; and in place of the solemn followers of Herbert Spencer’s synthetic philosophy there are the hordes of behaviorists, pragmatists, Freudians, and Marxians, who rejecting the kingdom of God, are actuated by an ardent faith that it can come on earth as it is not in Heaven. Behind these not always harmonious groups of anti-intellectual revolutionaries there are the well-organized armies of biological, psychological, and social science who lend the benevolent but non-partisan support of their expert knowledge to the new attempts to humanize the world on the basis of a philosophy of mechanistic evolution. In all countries, but more particularly in our own, cultural trends have been organized with respect to the Darwinian revolution of two generations ago. Directly or indirectly serious talk has been motivated by monkeys and species, and the plebeian past of man and his works.

But now there are signs that a new era is coming, an era of counter-revolution in which theology gains a new handmaid and returns to power. In this new era, if the signs are not mistaken, there will be a radical reorientation of cultural interests, and the centre of the stage on which human concerns are enacted will be occupied neither by the idealistic philosophy of eighteenth century Germany nor by the materialistic biology of nineteenth century England, but by the mathematical physics of the whole world of today and tomorrow.

Why physics of all sciences should be destined to displace from the focus of human interest the more humanistic inquiries into the nature of life and mind, is a long story. It is fortunately a story that has just been told and told with as much beauty as one could wish and with more clearness than one could hope for in “The Nature of the Physical World,” by A. S. Eddington, Plumian Professor of Astronomy in the University of Cambridge, and Gifford Lecturer on Philosophy for the year 1927.

When a scientist of the first rank stoops to expound for the benefit of the lay reader the most recent and recondite theories in his own field, it is an event. And when the author is, as in this case, not only a scientist and expounder of science but a Christian mystic who interprets the philosophic significance and defends the religious implications of his austere formulas, things may be expected to happen; and they do. The book is really gorgeous.



The new physics is not the science of dead matter; for “dead matter” is dead, and something that is much too lively for comfort, at least for intellectual comfort, has taken its place. The ancient physics of the nineteenth century described a world of hard little particles moving separately and in clusters varying in size all the way from molecules to stars. The motions of these particles were regulated by simple forces of attraction and repulsion which varied inversely as the square of the distance, and which they exerted on one another. The space in which the particles carried on was of the homely variety known as Euclidian. It was infinite in all directions; but its appalling bigness was offset by its simplicity. Moreover, it was filled with an invisible, continuous, motionless substance called ether, which carried the waves of light from star to star and atom to atom. Through this quiet ocean all material bodies swam like fishes. And by clever experiments, like that of Michelson and Morley with light waves, the direction and speed with which our planet and the whole solar system were really moving with respect to the

motionless ether could be discovered. In this universe there was of course not only space and matter and energy, but also infinite time which was independent of space and even simpler in its nature. In fact, this old-fashioned time was so very simple and obvious that it did not need to be talked about.

Matter and energy were distinct entities and each remained constant in its quantity through all changes of quality. And in addition to this first great law of the conservation of matter and energy, there was a second law, that described an irreversible, or one-way, tendency in all processes. According to this law, named variously the Dissipation of Energy, the Second Law of Thermo-dynamics, the Increase of Entropy, matter always tended to concentrate itself, and energy to scatter itself. Thus when two bodies were attracted toward each other and collided, they would bounce away; but they did not bounce away quite as fast as they came together. Some of their motion or energy was imparted first to the particles composing them and later to the ether surrounding them, where in the form of waves of light or radiant heat, it scattered ever outward. The ultimate result to be expected was a *dénouement* in which all the matter should be concentrated in a lifeless lump and all the energy degraded to the form of radiation, expanding forever over the shoreless sea of empty ether. The old world thus seemed to be running down. And if it had had all eternity in which to run down it was (and still is) something of a problem as to why its dismal end had not yet been attained.



This nineteenth century universe was an intelligible universe, but the things that have happened to it in the last thirty years are terrible. First came the Theory of Relativity which has disrupted the old world as a whole, changing its size and basic structure beyond all recognition; second, the Quantum Theory which has not only disrupted the atomic parts of the universe, but threatens to destroy the law of causality itself within those tiny regions and to substitute for it a scheme of primary anarchy and indeterminism, not incompatible with certain secondary and statistical regularities in the world at large.

We may begin with relativity as the better known, though less devastating of the revolutions. First Michelson and Morley failed to discover that motion of the earth through a fixed ether which there was every reason to suppose they could find. Their apparatus was so perfect and their methods so sound that their failure was taken to mean that velocity through the ether was not only undiscovered but undiscoverable. And it is one of the rules of science, or at least of present-day science, that a thing physically undiscoverable is a thing that does not physically exist. The ether through which bodies move with a definite velocity was, then, to be regarded as non-existent.

More followed, when Einstein propounded an idea that was perhaps the most extraordinary in the whole history of science. “Let us pretend,” he said, “that a light flash, which always moves at 186,000 miles a second, will always pass every other thing at the same speed, whether the other things are themselves moving towards its source, or away from it, or just standing still.” If this new postulate about light does not seem queer, try to imagine the mayor’s automobile traveling in such a way that when it was going either north or south on Main Street it passed at the same relative speed all the other unequally moving and oppositely moving cars, as well as those parked by the side-walk. This would seem absurd. And if it should be discovered that the people in the other cars reported that the mayor’s car had passed them at the standard rate of speed, this would arouse your curiosity and make you suspect that something was wrong with the new speedometers installed in each car and specially designed for measuring its speed relative to other cars instead of the speed relative to the road, as in the old-fashioned speedometers.

Your suspicion would be quickly confirmed, for if from your own car you could examine with a kind of spy-glass the clocks and measuring rods comprising these new instruments, you would find that their measures of time and space went slower and

faster and contracted and expanded in a uniform but ridiculous fashion, so that it was no wonder they always reported that the mayor’s car passed them at the same speed. Your new comfort would be of only brief duration, however, because you would find on comparing notes that each driver claimed to have discovered that all other cars including your own were wrong as to their speedometers, excepting only those that were at rest with him or running at the same rate beside him. In this situation some one might come to the rescue with the suggestion that you should assume that there is no fixed road and no absolute space or time with respect to which all instruments except one’s own are wrong, but that space and time are nothing but the records of the instruments. So that instead of the drivers contradicting one another as to their speeds with respect to a road which, being undiscoverable (like the ether), could be assumed not to exist, they ought all to agree to take the mayor’s speed in place of the road as the standard for measuring one another’s speeds. At first it would all seem queer and complicated but after a little while the rules for estimating the deviations of the instruments in the different cars and correlating them would become familiar and simple, and then new things would be discovered.

This little fable illustrates the Special Theory of Relativity. First, postulate that the velocity of light shall be always the same with respect to any moving system. Then, in order to make the implications of this postulate self-consistent, make a second postulate, to the effect that space-distances and time-intervals in differently moving systems increase and decrease according to how they move. Believe, in short, not that space and time are absolute and velocity variable, but that one velocity, the velocity of light, is absolute, and space and time variable and measurable with reference to it. Then thirdly, in order to make this second postulate intelligible, adopt a third postulate to the effect that space and time intervals are not real apart from the instruments that record them, so that when you describe them as lengthening or shortening, curving or kinking, you are only referring to certain comparisons between the readings of rulers and clocks on one system with similar, but different, readings on another system.



This theory of Special Relativity was, as we know, extended or generalized by Einstein so as to apply not only to relative *uniform* motions but to relative *accelerated* motions. The results have been amazing. Space and time are not only relative to the bodies and motions by which they are measured, they are relative to one another, so that instead of a three-dimensional *space* in which matter is contained, and a one-dimensional *time* in which changes are contained, we have a single four-dimensional continuum of “space-time.” This space-time is an inseparable aspect of mass and energy, which are themselves inter-dependent aspects of the same thing. While the *time* aspect continues to be regarded as infinite, the *space* aspect is finite though boundless. It is as if the material world were curved in a fourth dimension around into itself after the manner in which a plane is curved in a third dimension around into itself to make the surface of a sphere. The new physicists, however, warn us, sometimes sternly and sometimes querulously, not to take this analogy too literally. If we did take it literally we should naturally ask what interesting mysteries (psychic or even theistic) lay inside our four-dimensional hypersphere and what other possible universes might lie outside of it. And to raise any such questions in polite scientific circles is regarded as the height of bad form.

Thus we may tentatively imagine our universe as the three-dimensional curved “surface” of a hypersphere whose distance around is perhaps not much more than a billion trillion miles. If you traveled in a straight line due north, never deviating up or down or east or west, you would finally return home. This will remind us that the new universe is neo-Ptolemaic, larger in size, but even more hopelessly finite than the world of pre-Copernican days. But we must subtract from this image any thought of inside or outside and conceive of it merely as a skin, finite in extent, yet with *nothing*, not even empty space, either within or without. I suppose that the