

Personal Glimpses of George Fitch, Humorist

[From The Literary Digest.]

"A bit of old earth's salt, too soon dissolved, and never to be replaced. Peace to his luminous spirit!" Thus Bert Taylor, paragrapher of the Chicago Tribune pays tribute to George Fitch, of "Homeburg" and "Siwash"—an American humorist, whom, all seem agreed, we could ill afford to lose, and whose death, on August 9, has left grieving a host of his admiring readers. George Fitch never enjoyed quite the prominence of Finley Peter Dunne and George Ade, and yet many readers considered him the peer of any living humorist. These two contemporaries of his blossomed forth a decade earlier than he, and that fact perhaps accounts for their far wider recognition; for the last decade of American humor has been a period of rank luxuriance, in which no perfect flower could reign supreme. Few popular magazines of the present day are complete without their tame humorist, lurking somewhere in the back pages, making almost painless the reader's transition from the dull, matter-of-fact reading matter to the symposium of art and wit comprised in the advertising pages. Few newspapers will risk publication without a liberal frosting of humor, whether it be in the dignified vein of the old-style paragrapher, the impertinences of the "columnist," or the slap-stick "comics." In all this welter of mirth the quiet, slow drollery of a George Fitch passed unnoticed by many who might have been its friends. But perhaps they will have another chance, for there are many who believe that Mr. Fitch's work will live. The Chicago Herald (for which he was for many months a contributor) finds his greatest value for permanence in "a certain democracy of humorous appeal which strikes one as a typical product of the middle west." And of his activities it remarks that—

"It remained for him to discover the humorous possibilities of the small American college—itsself one of the most widely disseminated and typical of American institutions. And the thousands who have laughed, not without a touch of reminiscent thoughtfulness, at his Siwash college stories will feel they have lost an old friend. For pure and infectious fun his tales of the "Demon Motor-Boat" would be hard to match among

the productions of American humorists. In the stories about the characters and doing of a little town—typical of thousands of others—he was again at his best. They have an under-current of reality and a suggestion of universality that make them really worth while.

"As a citizen George Fitch had convictions and tried to live up to them. His brief political career illustrated the familiar fact that a genuine gift of humor is seldom found apart from a real desire to do something to make the world better as well as brighter. It was not given to him to become the scourge of meanness and pettiness and other bad qualities, as some great humorists have been. But the will was there to help and serve as well as amuse, and this will found its expression in his political affiliations."

It was in Peoria that Mr. Fitch was best known, for here his career really began, as a writer of "Transcripts" on the Peoria Herald-Transcript. Thus it is only natural to find the Peoria Journal declaring that, despite his popularity as a humorist, his qualities as a man were of vastly more importance. We read:

"George Fitch was above all an honest man. His convictions were established only after deliberations, but when he reached a conclusion that a man or an institution deserved either support or strenuous opposition he was too honest to be changed by minor circumstances. Naturally gentle and friendly, he instilled this spirit into his writings except at the times when his convictions told him that an evil should be attacked—and then he would fight this evil with the weapons which were most effective.

"The great humorist was primarily serious—as are all great humorists. He was also well rounded—as are a few great humorists. His keen interest in the welfare of Peoria and her institutions is well known. His interest in state and national politics was evident. His information on subjects of widely different character was remarkable. His popular paragraphs, filled with wit and philosophy, did not prevent him from writing serious articles and substantial editorials. In fact, his famous literary products include serious stories

and serious magazine articles, as well as his more widely read humorous articles and sketches.

"To know George Fitch the journalist was not as inspiring as to know George Fitch the man. Endowed by his parents with honesty, industry, and exceptional talent along widely different lines, he developed character and qualities which not only made him a truly great man, but which guaranteed his success in the field in which he chose to work and for which he was so peculiarly adapted."

His humor was not the sort that lends itself to quips and cranks and like conceits. It was a slower sort, to be consumed in generous portions and leisurely fashion, rolled under the tongue, clucked over. It is, therefore, difficult to sample adequately; but a few portions are submitted by the Chicago Herald, culled from the "vest-pocket essays" that appeared for some time in that paper. A few of these follow, in the form of observations upon a variety of subjects which, quite possibly, the majority of us take altogether too seriously. There is, for example, the affinity of the hen and the advertiser, expressed in terms of duck-eggs:

"The duck's one talent is swimming. It swims gracefully and easily as a life-preserver. Where the hen would yell for help and drown, the duck floats gaily off, doing nine knots an hour by paddling with its webbed feet. The duck lays an egg twice as large as the hen's, but it is no sort of a press-agent, and the price of duck-eggs is never quoted.

"Straw hats in December are not as out of date as a battle-ship by the time it has been launched. It costs \$11,000,000, and is the most powerful thing on earth except, perhaps, a United States district judge. But the nation which has just dug down for it can't take any pleasure in it, because the country next door has just completed plans for a ship which will make this one look as foolish as a rowboat with a hoop-skirt for a turret.

"After a good journeyman hater has spent a few years on the job he gets so much acid into his thoughts that it eats large holes in his disposition, and people begin to climb hastily for the other side of the street when they see him coming. Many a man has hated himself out of a job, out of his optimism, and out of his friends, while the object of his hate has gone on gaining weight and happiness each year.

"Hans Wagner is an old man, as baseball players go, and has been batting around Pittsburg for a good many years. Sometimes he bats .400 and sometimes only .300, but he always bats enough to make himself a pest in New York, Chicago, and elsewhere. Wagneritis is a common and very distressing disease among pitchers.

"Getting mad consists of cutting out the muffler and taking the hands off the steering-wheel—mentally. When a man gets mad he stops thinking with his brain and turns the job over to his fists and lungs. Then he produces a mess of ideas as a child produces art with a pail of red paint.

"A bank account is not a thing of beauty, but it is a very present help in time of trouble. A bank-account is an insulation between misfortune and hunger, between no work and no shoes, and between old age and the poorhouse.

"A vegetarian is a person who will not eat his fellow animals. It is easy enough to be a vegetarian if you are a European peasant. All you have to do is to eat what you can get.

"Comfort is an era of good feeling on the part of the human body. If a man has comfort no part of his body has any complaint. His neck feels as good as his back, and his legs feel as well satisfied as his di-

gestive plant. He is at peace with the world, and the man who tries to pry him out of his armchair to make a speech before a political ward-meeting is as likely as not to be sued for damages.

"Millions of golf-balls are made each year in this country, but the visible supply does not increase. In fact, there is no visible supply of golf balls. After a ball has gone into use it is invisible most of the time. Some day, thousands of years hence, archeologists, digging around the United States, will find vast deposits of golf-balls in various spots. These spots will represent the golf-courses of today.

"There is much to be said on the value of swimming. If a man knows how to swim he much safer while on the water in steamers which are equipped with cast-iron life-preservers. When a man has traveled a mile or more through cold water by kicking his legs like a frog he becomes overconfident, and some day when he is greatly in need of land he is unable to discover any except that directly beneath him.

"Bowling is the best-natured game in the world. The good nature in bowling comes from the fact that there is nothing to dispute over. The game doesn't even need an umpire. After a man has bowled ten games with a total stranger the two are life-long friends.

"A financier is a man who can make \$2 grow for himself where one grew for some one else before. If the financier had a dollar and needed two, he would use the dollar as first payment on a \$10 bill, and he would then bond the bill for a \$20 gold-piece and would charge \$5 for doing this. Then he would sell an option on the \$20 gold-piece at \$17 for \$1 to forty-five people, and then would dispose of a half-interest in the entire transaction for \$150, \$2 down and the rest payable in short-term notes."

ADOPTING A MOTTO

Elsewhere in The Leader will be found a "friendly" attack by the Lincoln, Neb., State Journal on Hon. W. J. Bryan, in his home town, following which is Mr. Bryan's reply in his paper, The Commoner. Mr. Bryan is an honest, honorable, upright, Christian gentleman, who is working zealously for the moral uplift of the world. His detractors oppose him either because they can not comprehend the high moral plane on which he stands, or they prefer one infinitely lower. In the scriptural words quoted by the Nebraska State Journal with a characteristic sneer, The Leader adopts as its motto: "Whither thou goest I will go; and whither thou lodgest I will lodge; where thou diest will I die. The Lord do as to me and more also if aught but death part thee and me." The Journal hits it exactly in the above quotation. Millions of honest people, who believe in the moral uplift of the nation, pin their faith in William Jennings Bryan. —Shelbyville (Ill.) Leader.

"VODKA"

The liquor interests of America are spending a great deal of money advertising a statement of the Russian minister of finance that the suppression of vodka has cost in the loss of revenue 900 million dollars the past year.

They fail to say that the report of the finance minister also stated that within the same period the savings banks of Russia had increased deposits of 900 million dollars.

They also fail to say what that former liquor revenue used to cost in misery, in loss of character and in unemployment and in crime.—Kansas City Times.

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