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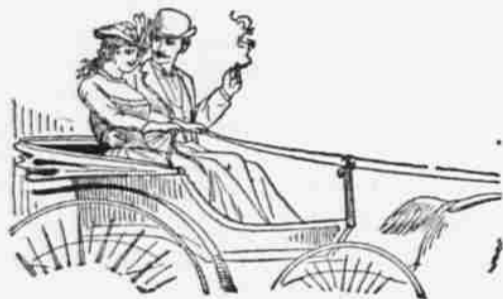
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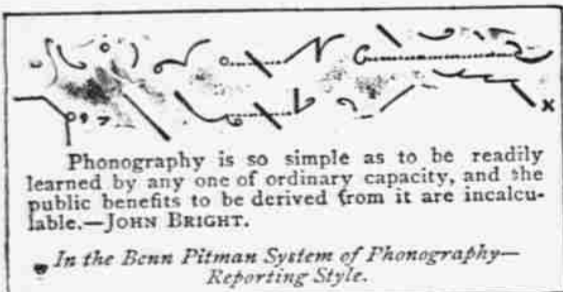
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PUNS AND PUNSTERS

A DEFINITION OF THE FORMER AND
EXAMPLES OF THE LATTER.

Some Specimens of the Better Class
of What is Called the "Lowest Form
of Wit"—A Brilliant Coterie of Brit-
ish Punsters.

Is the pun a legitimate form of wit? Some people think not, and Dr. Johnson said that a man who would make a pun would pick a pocket. But the fact is that the general objection to puns is because of their frequent lack of wit—that is to say, it is directed to bad puns. We do not want to discuss bad puns or even to hear them. The point is, whether good puns are admissible as legitimate and commendable expressions of humor. It is of no use to say, like Sydney Smith, that puns ought to be in bad repute, and, although one finds an incorrigible punster—often, it is true, an incorrigible bore—in every little circle of social life, one does not find the race of pick-pockets to be increasing alarmingly in numbers.

It is probable that there are a few even in these days of culture capable of appreciating the profound witticism which De Quincey discovered in the jests for which poor Ælius Lamia was put to death by Domitian.

If we want to argue the legitimacy of puns we are obliged to fall back on the old discussion as to the difference between wit and humor. The definitions are legion, of course, but not one of them is wholly satisfactory. "Knowledge comes and wisdom lingers," Tennyson says, and perhaps we might find upon this a parody, with some approach to truth—that wit sparkles and humor permeates. But there is little profit to be got in analysis of this kind. What is funny isn't necessarily witty, but what is funny must have in it or suggested by it some of the essence of humor. Thus Charles Lamb was not so far wrong when he said that the most farfetched and startling puns are the best.

The familiar inquiry, "Is it true that the first apple was eaten by the first pair?" is farfetched, but one cannot deny the humor of it. Again, in the conundrum, "Why is blind man's buff like sympathy?" "Because it is a fellow feeling for a fellow creature," there is a direct application which is also unquestionably humorous. Then, as another example of a pun which is absurdly apparent, there was Douglas Jerrold's remark about a man to whom he had repeatedly written in vain for some money.

"I have written him," said Jerrold to an acquaintance, "but got nothing."
"Strange," said the other, "for he is a man full of kindness."

"Yes," rejoined Jerrold, "unremitting kindness."
A pun which requires explanation in brackets is indeed simply intolerable. The Oxford scholar who, meeting a porter carrying a hare through the streets, asked, "Prithee, friend, is that thy own hare or a wig?" required no commentator. Nor did Tom Hood, who, when all is said and done, remains the prince of British punsters. He puns as naturally as he laughs. A babe can see the point of his jokes and the crustiest dry as dust cannot resist them.

Theodore Hook is thought by many to be equal to Hood as a punster, but Hook was labored and slow in comparison. There is an impromptu air about Hood's puns which is incomparable and an unexpectedness even when you are looking for them that is delicious. Frederick Locker once or twice seemed to have Hood's unconscious ease, as thus:

He cannot be complete in aught
Who is not humorously prone.
A man without a merry thought
Can hardly have a funny bone.

John Hill Burton relates a legal joke which to the legal mind has all the charm of a pun. One day a bailiff, serving a writ, had been compelled by the defendant to swallow the document. In a state of great agitation and anger the officer rushed into the court, over which Lord Norbury was presiding, to complain of the indignity. He was met by the expression of his lordship's hope that the writ was "not returnable in this court."

Bret Harte, by the way, was not usually regarded as a professional wit, and yet among the good things which cling to one's memory is the couplet in the "Heathen Chinee":

Concealed in his nails, which were taper,
What is common in tapers—that's wax.

Somebody has written a parody in which a candidate for examination even beats the record of the Mongolian: Concealed in his palms, which were spacious,
What is common in palms—and that's dates.

Speaking of palms recalls the famous pun of the bishop of Oxford, who when asked by a lady why he was nicknamed Soapy Sam replied, "Because, madam, I am always getting into hot water and always coming out with clean hands."

Perhaps it may be said that some of these examples are not true puns. But a pun is not necessarily a twisting of spelling and a contortion of syllables, as the writers of burlesque and "comic" papers seem to think. It is play upon words and to be really entitled to be considered witty should play both upon the sound and the sense, if possible.—London Tit-Bits.

The Home.

The home is the cornerstone and bulwark of the state, and everything which tends to keep alive and renew its influence and associations should be cherished and encouraged.—Cincinnati Enquirer.

Pawning a Bank Book.

The pawning of the wedding ring has become a pathetic commonplace to those who are familiar with police court and coroner's court stories or with the private petitions for help of the deserving and undeserving poor. But we confess that with the Westminster magistrate we have never heard before of pawning bank books. Yet on expert pawnbroker's evidence elicited by police inquiry it is found that this is not at all an unusual practice. In the vast majority of cases it would seem to be a simpler matter to draw on the bank account rather than borrow on the strength of it from the pawnshop. But one of the unfortunate possibilities of the practice is revealed in the particular case mentioned at Westminster. A picture frame maker wishing to withdraw £3 from the bank could not find his bank book and then learned that his wife had been putting the book in and out of pawn for eight years, having borrowed £7 10s. on it the first time, and of course she had been paying interest on her various transactions.—London Pall Mall Gazette.

Robinson Crusoe, Economist.

When the average boy spends the deluged hours of imaginative youth in devouring the pages of "Robinson Crusoe" he has, like most people of more mature years, no idea that he is perusing a work of profound philosophy written by one of the greatest political thinkers of the English speaking race.

Taken with a knowledge of the facts of the career of De Foe, "Robinson Crusoe" can properly be considered a story intended to illustrate the heavy burden of trouble placed upon any single individual isolated from his fellows and compelled to maintain his existence without their aid. The tale shows in an inimitable way how all civilized men are interdependent. Regarded from this point of view, the author of the most widely read work of fiction ever written becomes an object of particular interest to all thinkers upon politics.—William N. Hill, M. D., in Watson's Magazine.

To "Pound" Words.

When the reputation of punning is under discussion it is well to bear in mind that the very name of the jest confesses to a degree of atrocity. To "pun," according to the London Chronicle, is to "pound" words, to beat them into forced conditions, so that the philologists believe. "He would pun thee into shivers with his fist," says Thersites in "Troilus and Cressida," meaning physical "pounding." "Pun" is not a slipshod development of "pound," but its original form, the Anglo-Saxon verb being "punian," and "pun" or "poun" having developed a final "d," just as "soun" became "sound" and as the illiterate turn "gown" into "gownd." Curiously enough, "pun" and "pound" have no connection with "punching" a man's head, which is simply "punishing," contracted, or with "punching" a ticket, which goes back to the Latin "pungere," to prick or puncture.

Sir Humphry Davy.

Sir Humphry Davy married a widow as peculiar as himself. His pet affection was a lack of time. He was always in a hurry. He pretended that he had no leisure to dress himself, and when a change of linen became necessary he simply put one shirt over another until he was known to have on five or six shirts at a time. Of course he could not wear this amount of apparel without appreciably increasing his size, and his friends not in the secret were sometimes surprised to see him fall off in apparent weight twenty pounds in a day. His wife's great anxiety was to keep him "fit for company," but as he did not care a fig for company she had no easy task, and domestic discord was a common thing.

Ancient Cups.

The cups of the Assyrians closely resembled our saucers. Every nobleman and gentleman had his own cup and cup bearer, the latter of whom always accompanied him to a feast carrying before him the cup of gold, silver, crystal or marble, which his master only used on state occasions. Saucers for cups were introduced in the latter part of the eighteenth century and at first were greatly ridiculed, the persons who employed them being said not to be able to drink without having two cups.

Two Different Matters.

"I cannot understand, sir, why you permit your daughter to sue me for breach of promise. You remember that you were bitterly opposed to our engagement because I wasn't good enough for her and would disgrace the family."

"Young man, that was sentiment this is business."

Selecting Judges.

Dr. Franklin thought that judges ought to be appointed by lawyers, for added the shrewd man, in Scotland where this practice prevails, they all ways select the ablest member of the profession in order to get rid of him and share his practice among themselves.

A Pointer.

Two thieves were breaking into a door when the master of the house hearing them, looked out of the window and said: "Friends, come a little later. We are not yet in bed."—"Humor of Spain."

Dangerous Aphorism.

Bachelor—Talk is cheap. Benedict—For goodness sake, don't advertise it as a bargain while my wife is around.—Brooklyn Life.

To do what we can by our ballot and influence to secure good is to work with God.—Phillips Brooks.

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