

HUMOROUS RETORTS

BY BOTH LEARNED AND IGNORANT.

A retort may be either civil or uncivil, courteous or un-courteous, witty or severe. The simple meaning of the word is thus given by a well-known compiler: "To return an argument, accusation, censure, or incivility; to make a severe reply." A few examples may not be uninteresting to the reader.

We must not always infer, because a man takes to the army as a profession, or for pastime, or even under any other circumstances adopts a military uniform, that a plucky and courageous disposition has prompted him to the act, or we might never have heard of the following:

"Many days to your Honor, and may God bless you, for you once saved my life," said a tattered mendicant, to a captain under whom he had served.

"Indeed," replied the gallant-looking officer, with a smile; "I have no particular recollection of the heroic circumstance. Maybe you mistake me for a doctor?"

"No," answered the beggar; "I served under you at the famous battle of Corunna, in 1800, and when I saw you run away I thought it was high time for me to quit the scene of action, too, or otherwise I should certainly have been killed."

On the other hand, it is doubtful whether it is good policy to damp the ardor of a youthful aspirant to military honors, as was the case with the present writer, who, having joined the Thirty-seventh Middlesex Rifles some years ago, arrived home, one evening, in high glee, and told his father he had just got his arms.

"Arms, indeed!" muttered the old gentleman, dryly. "I am afraid your first thoughts on a battle-field would be how to make the best use of your legs."

Evidently, we cannot be too cautious when we "argue the point" with others, or too careful in the choice of an expression, especially with those who are reputedly known to be both sharp and clever. Sometimes the "tables are turned" when we least expect it. A severe home-thrust was once given to a young country clergyman, who happened at the time to be walking home from church with one of his elder parishioners. It was a very icy day, when the latter suddenly slipped and fell at full length on his back. The minister, at a glance, feeling assured that he was not much hurt, said to him:

"Ah, my good sir, pray give me your hand; sinners stand on slippery places."

The old gentleman looked up, and immediately answered: "So I perceive; you certainly keep your feet remarkably well."

A native of the Emerald Isle is credited with the well-known remark, "that he never opened his mouth but he put his foot in it." The subjoined example may be a case in point. An Irish member of Parliament boasting of his attachment to the jury system, in a room full of company, of whom Curran, the distinguished barrister and celebrated orator, was one, said:

"With trial by jury I have lived, and, by the blessing of God, with trial by jury I will die!"

"Why, then," said Curran, in mock amazement, "you've entirely made up your mind to be hanged, Dick!"

It is related of Lord Falkland, that in 1658, under the Commonwealth, his admission to the House of Commons was very much opposed by several members, he being barely of legal age. Some urged that he had not yet sown his wild oats. "Perhaps not," he quickly retorted; "but no doubt a good opportunity will be afforded me to sow them in this House, where evidently there are plenty of geese to pick them up." The petulance of youth was here most forcibly exhibited.

To be equal to the occasion is with some persons a natural gift. We may mention an incident in connection with the famous French Marshal Bossompierre. During his incarceration in the Bastille, he was observed by a friend one morning to be diligently turning over the leaves of a Bible, whereupon the friend inquired what particular passage he was looking for.

"One that I cannot find," was the reply—"a way to get out of this prison."

On his coming out of prison, Louis XIII. asked him his age. Fifty was all that the gallant soldier would own to.

To the surprised look of the king, Bossompierre answered: "Sire, I subtract ten years passed in the Bastille, because I did not employ them in your majesty's service."

Some years, however, before this, when serving in the capacity of ambassador to Spain, he was telling the court how he first entered Madrid.

"I was mounted on the very smallest mule in the world—"

"Ah!" interrupted the joke-loving king, "it must, indeed, have been an amusing sight to have seen the biggest ass in the place mounted on so small a quadruped."

With a profound obeisance came the quiet rejoinder:

"I was your majesty's representative."—*Sel.*

A Story of Nantucket.

Walter J——, the only son of a widow of Nantucket set sail when twelve years old with the captain of a whaler. One dark and rainy night when they were sailing on the China seas, it began to blow very hard, and all hands were ordered aloft to shorten sail. In the darkness and rain the boy fell from the mast. Had he fallen upon the deck he would in all probability have been killed; but he struck the back-stay—a rope drawn tight like the string of a violin—and rebounded into the water. Soon the cry came, "A man overboard!" The captain felt very sad when he learned it was Walter J——. He put the ship about and tacked back and forth, but nothing could be seen of the boy. Before giving up the search, however, he called the men aft and asked them whether anything else could be done, "for I don't want you to go back to Nantucket and say that if something else had been done Walter J—— could have been saved." No man, however, offered a suggestion, and, although the time had been long—perhaps half an hour—since the lad had fallen overboard, the captain made a few turns more and called on the men for a final decision whether anything more could be done. He finally concluded to hold on his course, when one of the men said that he heard a cry. They listened and soon heard a call, "Keep her away or you'll run over me." Half a dozen ropes were thrown out by as many different persons, when the boy said, "Make a bow line. I'm too weak to hold on." A bow line is a rope with a large loop firmly tied in it. It was thrown out, the lad put it over one leg, held on by his hands and was drawn on board. He had fallen into the water with a suit of clothes, tarpaulin overalls and shoes on. He was drawn out naked as when he first appeared in the world, having managed, in spite of the great exertion of swimming, to divest himself of all his clothes in order that they might not impede his movements. When asked how he had been able to endure so long, he answered that he was on the point of giving up from fatigue and letting his feet go down, preparatory to sinking, when he thought of his mother and kept on. He is still living in Nantucket.

Business before Pleasure.

There is a sagacious Newfoundland dog in Norwich. He will take the basket, in which is a note, and go to the market, get meat, vegetables, or whatever the note calls for, and carry it safely home. But he has a daily task assigned him which he performs, rain or shine, and that is to carry his mistress her dinner. She keeps a millinery establishment, and does not go home to her noonday meal. Regularly as the day comes around, the dog may be seen trotting along Main Street at about 11:30 with the basket in his mouth, looking neither to the right nor left, but going straight to the store, where he sets it down and watches it until his mistress comes for it. And he is so well-known, too, among the Norwich dogs that he is never molested. But on Monday a stranger dog undertook to have a little racket with him while he was loaded with his commissary stores. He hung to the basket, but stopped long enough to get a good look at the cowardly cur that had interfered with him, and then started off on a run to the store, where he dropped the basket and immediately returned to the street and began to search for his assailant. He found him on Franklin Avenue, and proceeded to chastise him in true canine style. In about half a minute he sat down and watched that cur put in his best jumps for the mittens of Voluntown, giving a ki-hi at every step.—*Tarford (Conn.) Courant.*