

...Mr. "Dooley" Dunne...

The east wind that bringeth all good things landed Finlet Peter Dunne on these shores t'other day, after a three months absence in Europe. Perhaps the moment is opportune for a glance at the man who created Mr. Dooley and who is today the most famous and popular newspaper writer in the world.

One seems to have heard of Dooley for so long a time that one is at first taken aback by the youthfulness of his creator. Peter Dunne—as his friends call him—is still under thirty-five—the grand climacteric of the literary man—and has no gray hairs or other signs of premature age to explain. His blue eyes sparkle brightly behind the glancing pebbles that he wears, less from need perhaps than from the literary habit. Truly Irish are these eyes, full of changing expression, whimsical and kindly; and the smile that rarely leaves his handsome mouth discloses a set of teeth which a woman might envy. All in all, it is a genuinely Irish face of the best type, and when in moments of earnestness that mouth is compressed into a straight line, you can make no doubt of Mr. Dunne's ancestry. For the rest, this famous young man dresses quietly, as the phrase goes, and in good taste; his manner is frankly genial and self-possessed, with something of the keenness of the journalist showing through, but without a trace of the peculiar affectation that is dubbed "literary." Meeting him on Broadway, you might say that physically and sartorially, Mr. Finley Dunne looks like an attractive composite of Sherlock Holmes Gillette and Nat Goodwin.

Mentally, I need not say, he is himself sui generis, as spontaneously witty in his talk as the best of his written product. Quite unspooled, too, by the favor of the public and the great reputation which has come to him. Acting always like the one man in company who has nothing on his mind; though the responsibility for the wit of the Irish race is now, by universal consent, placed on his shoulders. Determined, obviously, not to be "literary," not to be anything but himself, a good fellow, having a continuously good time in the best of all possible worlds.

The present writer is in a position to know that Mr. Dunne's work is more in request at this moment by the newspaper syndicates than that of any other man in America. In fact it is "Dooley" first and the rest nowhere. During his late European trip Mr. Dunne cut out the "Dooley" business entirely, and the syndicates were frantic. The newspapers would accept no substitute for Dunne's matter—it was "Dooley" or nobody. Even here, on the narrow island of Manhattan, it's a hard proposition to locate Mr. Finley Peter Dunne at short notice, even though you may be, in a degree, admitted to his confidence and friendship. But how to reach him on the continent of Europe especially since he has a habit of never leaving his address? The syndicates, after much costly and futile cabling, gave it up in despair, and Mr. Dunne had the most enjoyable vacation of his life.

I suspect there is a shrewd purpose in Dunne's thus occasionally starving his vogue. Everybody knows that "Mr. Dooley" is as wise as he is witty. Evidently he is bound that the public, noted for its fickleness, shall not have too much of him. How soon it has tired of favorites whom it were easy to name, so brief and fleeting are their generation! And what a barren, dreary, jejune thing is the echo of such reputations, loitering forlornly in newspaper offices, stale and musty and all but forgotten, like the files that are dragged into light at long intervals to verify some fact of ancient history! The many-headed newspaper public is indeed to be feared for its favor. Today it acclaim, tomorrow it forgets. "Mr. Dooley" is both witty and wise.

Whether meditated or not, Mr. Dunne's insouciance with regard to publishers and publishing is one of the most naively charming of his personal traits. We have seen how he occasionally worries the syndicates. He did a worse thing to Mr. Bok, of the Ladies' Home Journal, and that ably self-sufficient young man has "never been quite the same" since the experience. Perhaps, though pretty well known, the story will bear telling again.

A couple of years ago Mr. Bok, with characteristic penetration, concluded that "Dooley" was at the height of his vogue, and, therefore, invited him into the true temple of literature, i.e., the columns of the L. H. J. He proposed that Mr. Dunne should write a serial story of Irish-American life. He wanted it "hot off the bat"—fearing a possible decline in the fortunes of "Dooley"—and he offered to pay a fabulous price

for it. Nay, more, the purse should be Mr. Dunne's before the proposed work was delivered. Such was the reckless magnanimity of Bok, let it be recorded to the eternal honor of the trade.

These terms suited Dunne to a miracle and, though chary of contracts, he fell to work at once on the money and the story. The tale was, I think called "Mollie Donohue." It began well and went on prosperously for three installments. But the serial method was not happily suited to Mr. Dunne's literary inspiration and practice. Or the immediate payment clause failed of continuous attraction; or the impatience of the journalist manifested itself. Whatever may have been the reason, the author took a sudden trip to California (where he had one of the best times of his life) and nothing more was heard of "Mollie Donohue." My impression is that Mr. Dunne sometimes regrets her untimely end—there is no room for doubt that Mr. Bok feelingly concurs with him.

The question is often asked, "Will not Mr. Dunne embody in some work of permanent interest the qualities which have made the popularity of 'Dooley'?" I don't know, and, without claiming authority to speak, doubt if he knows himself. Against such a presumption is the journalistic habit which has been his for many years—he was city editor of a Chicago newspaper at 20 and has been in harness ever since. Against it also are the conditions of his present reputation, demanding, above all, the constant exercise of the journalistic faculty. As battles were necessary to Napoleon, so "opinions" are necessary to "Dooley." The public looks for him to commentate the big news of the week, the result of an election or the issue of a campaign or the coronation of King Edward VII. If the theme be congenial to his humor, the newspapers will know the sort of entertainment they will get, and they will pay any price for it.

Besides, it is not to be forgotten this is the day of the journalist, and Mr. Dunne is contemporary to the minute. I am not sure that if he had made a genuine success of the abortive "Mollie Donohue," we should have been more gratified than we were with the last volume of "Dooley." I, for one, would not give Dooley for a score of recently exploited successes in fiction. And then (which is perhaps the last word) we have to reckon with a fertile and fluid wit, exigent of immediate expression and impatient of what is called literary form.

Meantime—and what a saving clause it is—we are to give thanks for "Dooley." His vogue continues unabated, not merely in America but also in England, and, indeed, wherever the English tongue is spoken. The first "Dooley" book sold over one hundred thousand—its successors have done little worse. And though the dialect sometimes perplexes the experts, I have seen a letter from a County Meath man congratulating the author upon its close fidelity to the vernacular. "Dooley" goes at any rate. In book form, in newspaper or magazine sketch, the humor and philosophy of the Sage of Ar-r-hey Road are equally acceptable. Here, in New York, he is quoted on "East Side, West Side, all around the town." But his drolleries are not less current in Piccadilly and the Strand than on Fifth avenue and the Bowery. The British mind has often shown itself singularly inhospitable to American humor. It never made out Artemus Ward—it has not done much better with Mark Twain. Even the admirable Chauncey Depew fails to score with his usual brilliancy and success when his wit is transplanted to the region of Bow Bells. Not so "Mr. Dooley." The most entrenched strongholds of British Philistinism have surrendered to him. The British public both likes and understands him though the keen shafts of his sarcasm often penetrate the national sensitiveness, as in his famous deliverances on the Boer war. Let an Irish M. P. say half as much in the house of commons, and he would be mobbed. Even Mr. Dunne's literary endorsement in England is of the highest. The Academy describes the latest "Dooley" book as "superbly intelligent," and says "there is enough wit in it to stock a score of humorists." But the critic is not sure that "our old objection to hear the truth has been shelved in the case of this shrewd Irishman who intrudes his grinning visage into so many fastnesses of British seriousness and self-content."

This wonderful success which overleaps the lines of racial division is, above all things, due to the sunniest and most universal humor that has found expression in latter day literature. "Mr. Dooley" is the most popular of humorists because even his satire lacks gall; and the milk of human kindness irrigates his rough philosophy. And no stronger proof of this could be asked than that his humor passes current in England, though it goes there with that bait to prejudice, an Irish-American stamp upon it.

The genius of "Mr. Dooley" naturally condenses itself into epigrams, and many of these have a currency such as has rarely, if ever, been accorded to the sayings of an American humorist. Where the pudding is so liberally besprinkled with plums, it is easy and tempting to pick, and I shall not be blamed if I omit the favorite of any reader. Perhaps the following, as well as any that might be cited, show the sharp impact of a mind that has so wittily commented many phases of our national life and of contemporary history: "I'd like to've been ar-round in th' times th' historical novelists writes about—but I wudden't like to be in th' life insurance business."

'Tis a good thing th' funeral sermons ar-re not composed in th' confessional. People that talk loud an' offind ye with their insolence are us'lly shy men thryin' to get over their shyness. 'Tis a quiet, reserved, calm-spoken man that's mashed on himself. A man that'd expict to thrain lobsters to fly in a year is called a loonytic, but a man that thinks men can be tur-rned into angels be an liction is called a rayformer an' remains at large. If ye live enough before thirty ye won't care to live at all afthur fifty. A nation with colonies is kept busy. Look at England, she's like wan iv th' Swiss bell ringers. Th' nearest anny man comes to a conception iv his own death is lym' back in a comfortable coffin with his ears cocked fr' flattherin' remarks iv th' mourners.

What China needs is a Chinese exclusion act. 'Tis as hard fr' a rich man to enther th' kingdom iv hiven as it is fr' a poor man to get out iv purgatory. I care not who makes th' laws iv a nation if I can get out an injunction. A vote on th' tally-sheet is worth two in th' box. Thrust ivrybody—but cut th' caards. If they (the doctors) knew less about pizen an' more about gruel, an' opened fewer patients an' more windows, they'd not be so many Christyvan Scientists.

A hundred years from now Hogan may be as famous as th' Imprur Wilum, an' annyhow they'll both be dead, an' that's th' principal ingredient iv fame. No wan cares to hear what Hogan calls "Th' short an' simple scandals iv th' poor." No matter whether th' constitution follows th' flag or not th' supreme court follows th' fiction returns.

To sum up: Mr. Finley Peter Dunne is in love with life, which has not dealt ungenly by him, stands well in his own good opinion, is beloved by his friends and is warmly thought of by the world to whose gaiety he has contributed a full share. I am glad to believe that he never vexes his merry heart with the thought that he may not yet have built his momentum aere perennius. The most enviable thing about him is his talent and, next to that, his youth. When you are with him you are most agreeably impressed by the

combination and also by a certain contagious, hopeful lightheartedness which is, I daresay, part of his Irish inheritance. Besides being a genius, Finley Dunne is a good fellow and holds his friendships, as he does his fame, without compromise. I don't believe there is an atom of envy or malice in his composition. We have heard much of both these qualities as attaching to men of the literary stamp, and I do verily believe that a certain stage of the literary habit tends to ossification of the nobler sympathies, anchylosis of the humane impulses and the marble heart. Finley Dunne's brain and heart are both too big for that sort of thing. I am sure he would rather do a kindness to a suffering man and brother—aye, or an erring sister-woman—than anything else in the world, say even to write a book, which Prof. Peck, Miss Gilder and others of our literati might agree in pronouncing "literary." He is absolutely without the "bighead," which has come to be looked on in this country as an inevitable accompaniment of the slightest literary distinction, and which was, beyond doubt, a contributory circumstance in a recent fearful tragedy. Yesterday I saw him eagerly greeted on Broadway by men of national celebrity, glad to claim a smile or handshake from the man who moves the mirth of our seventy millions. A fortnight ago he was welcomed no less warmly in London, where he has as many friends as in New York.

If I were writing an interview with Mr. Dunne, I should tell you that he was received by the Pope while in Rome—think of "Dooley" in the Vatican—and that at Florence he hobnobbed with such men as Alfred Austin, Prof. Fiske and Villari, the historian. Also that he regards fighting Tim Healy as the ablest orator in the house of commons; has a great friendship and admiration for Kipling, in spite of their mutually antagonistic patriotism; loves Anthony Hope for his honest radicalism as well as his fine talents; thinks Justin McCarthy, fils, a most interesting man and a marvel of linguistic acquirements; likes to lose himself in Europe and forget that he drags "Dooley" at each remove; is fondest of Italy and Ireland, and does not presume to act the censor toward the race from which he sprang, in the manner of some literary Irishmen who might be named.

Thus without giving you an "interview"—of which he has a newspaper man's whimsical dread—you get an idea of the scope of this young man. For the creator of Dooley is now become a thorough cosmopolitan whose cheerful coming is looked for in many foreign cities where his fame has preceded him. The Order of Good Fellows is universal—and so is Dooley Dunne.

New York, June 1, 1902.
—St. Louis Mirror.

Waterloo of Amateur Detective
A careless young woman in starting to leave a car, dropped her purse. A young man, who evidently intended to leave the car at the same time, saw her drop the purse, picked it up and put it in his pocket. But his action had not been unnoticed. Just as he stepped from the car an elderly man gripped him by the arm and whispered, "If you don't give that purse to the young lady this instant I'll expose you." "Yes, certainly!" gasped the astonished young man. Then with a

grin, "I beg your pardon, Elizabeth, you dropped your purse."
"Oh, thank you, Jim," she replied as she took it.
"I hope you are satisfied," said Jim, turning to the elderly man.
"The lady is my sister."—Forward.

Witness—He looked me straight in the eye and—
Lawyer—There, sir, you flatly contradict your former statement!
Witness—How so?
Lawyer—You said before that he bent his gaze on you, and now you'll please explain how he could look you straight in the eye with a bent gaze!

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Stolen Sunday, June 8th, one malamute dog, very dark grey, white breast, light chops, light grey stripe running from point of nose up between eyes, front legs white, hind feet white, extreme tip of tail white, belly light color, always carries tail curled over back or left side, nose very small like a fox or coon. I will pay the above reward for any information that will lead to the arrest and conviction of the thief and recovery of dog.
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