

circumstances—no less than being buried in the ground for any length of time. Mr. Osborne says:

“Captain Wade told me he was present at the fakir’s exhumation after an interment of several months. Gen. Ventura having buried him in the presence of the Maharajah and many of his principal sirdars; and as far as I can recollect these were the particulars as witnessed by Gen. Ventura. After going through a regular course of preparation the fakir reported himself ready for the interment in a vault which had been prepared for the purpose by order of the Maharajah. On the appearance of Runject and his court, he (the fakir) proceeded to the final preparations that were necessary, and, after stopping with wax his ears and every other orifice through which it was possible for air to enter his body, except his mouth, he was stripped and placed in a bag. The last preparation consisted in turning his tongue back, and thus closing the gullet, whereupon he immediately died away into a sort of lethargy. The box was then closed and sealed with the Runject’s own seal, and afterward placed in a small deal box, which was also locked and sealed. The box was then placed in the vault, the earth thrown in and trodden down, a crop of barley sown over the spot, and sentries placed around it. The Maharajah was, however, very sceptical on the subject, and twice in the course of the 10 months he remained underground, sent people to dig him up, when he was found to be exactly in the same position, and still in a state of suspended animation. At the expiration of 10 months the fakir was exhumed in the presence of Capt. Wade, also the Maharajah and others. The Captain witnessed the breaking of the seals and the opening of the box and bag. He also examined the inanimate body minutely. It was at first motionless and pulseless, though its appearance was otherwise natural. In two hours the process of restoring the faculties and functions was fully accomplished, and the fakir was apparently as well as ever.”

Wonderful! exclaimed Schwaekheimer. If only Mr. Osborne really told that yarn; and if Capt. Wade actually told him; and if the aforesaid Capt. Wade and General Ventura were not lying!

Ah, if! I confess to being a little sceptical myself—to put it mildly. And yet there are so many occurrences in nature to surprise us and upset our pre-conceived ideas that the more one investigates the less he is disposed to call anything impossible. There have no doubt been cases where in the course of disease a certain condition arises, which we call catalepsy, where all power of voluntary motion is lost, and heart and lungs have seemed to cease their action, and yet life still remained, and even consciousness, just as in the case of St. Augustine’s priest. Take, for one example among several, that related by Dr. Crichton, and which I see Mr. Proctor has lately quoted in one of his magazine articles. Here is the account:

“A young lady, who had seemed gradually to sink until she died, had been placed in her coffin, careful scrutiny having revealed no signs of vitality. On the day appointed for her funeral, several hymns were sung before her door. She was conscious of all that happened around her, and heard her friends lamenting her death. She felt them put on the dead-clothes and lay her in the coffin, which produced an indescribable mental anxiety. She tried to cry, but her mind was without power, and could not act on the body. It was equally impossible for her to stretch out her arms, or to open her eyes or to cry, although she continually endeavoured to do so. The internal anguish of her mind, however, was at its utmost height when the funeral hymns began to be sung, and when the lid of the coffin was about to be nailed on. The thought that she was to be buried alive was the first one which gave activity to her mind, and caused it to operate on her corporeal frame. Just as the people were about to nail on the lid, a kind of perspiration was observed to appear on the surface of the body. It grew greater every moment; and a kind of convulsive motion was observed in the hands and feet of the corpse a few minutes after, during which fresh signs of returning life appeared. She at once opened her eyes, and uttered a most pitiable shriek.”

Well, said Schwaekheimer, this may be true, and so may many other stories like it; but it seems these cataleptic attacks are involuntary, and come in the course of disease. It does not make it any more clear that people can retire whenever they like for a month’s sleep, or that they can live without food at their own will and convenience.

No; it only shows that suspended animation is possible; and that under certain conditions of absolute rest, food can to some extent be dispensed with; but how to induce these conditions is yet among the undetermined problems.

Then there is nothing practical in the discussion. It is no satisfaction to know that that is possible which we can neither command nor control, nor does catalepsy settle the question of food or no food. How to get along without a meal when there is nothing in the house to eat—how to keep life in our paupers when our poor fund is exhausted—how to live on an empty stomach—is the answer to these questions any nearer?

No; no nearer. And, between you and me, when you hear of a person claiming to live without food for a month set the story down as one which may be true, but which requires more evidence before it can be accepted.

CL. T. C.

London, January, 1880.

AMERICAN WIT AND HUMOR.

What is wit? what is humor? and what is the difference between them? are questions which I do not purpose answering in this paper, but leave them to metaphysicians, who know everything in the abstract, and nothing in the concrete; everything in general, and nothing in particular. Locke places the distinction between wit and judgment: That where there is much judgment there is little wit, and little judgment where there is much wit. Sterne, who ridicules this distinction, compares wit and judgment to two knobs on the back of a chair, where each answers to each, and where one for harmony needs the other. This illustration would answer, too, in reference to wit and humor. Often you can distinguish them from each other only by their position, and frequently they so run into one another as to be undistinguishable and inseparable. Still, there are points of difference which separate them, and which, if not capable of being construed into a definition, at least give a characteristic significance to each. It is always conscious and personal, it is an intentional exercise of mind in the agent of it; humor on the contrary may be incidental, undesigned, impersonal and entirely unconscious. Addison, in his “Genealogy of Humor,” says that Truth is the founder of the family and the father of Good Sense; that Good Sense fathered it and married a lady of collateral line called Mirth, by whom she had issue, Humor!

Many confound wit with humor; but although the one often sets off the other, there is even in their harmony a marked distinction. Again some consider humor to be the acme of wit—the point of the sword of which humor is the edge. True, men laugh at wit as well as humor. There is, however, this difference between them: wit at times cuts, while humor never does. When Jerrold heard a foolish stranger say at dinner, “Sheep’s head forever,” he exclaimed, “What egotism!” This was a witty flash, and it hurt. There was, however, more humor in Jerrold than wit when he exclaimed, as he saw a tall man dance with a short lady, “There’s a mile dancing with a mile-stone!” It is a sharp tool to handle even in the most practised hands. It is not always a desirable quality, for the worst men often use it. It is very much embodied in the writings of Voltaire, who withered and blackened whatever he touched. Humor, however, without giving pain makes humanity merry; it would make us live more happily by making us laugh more heartily. With humor there is always associated a deep sensibility. The humorous man can rain tears as well as bring smiles. Comical humor is founded on a deep, thoughtful and manly character; but in wit there may be little of manliness or thought. It often happens that wit is accompanied with malignity. Pope was witty, but his wit only rendered mankind sad. Thackeray is wit all compact, but unlike Pope’s wit it is not relieved by fringes of humor.

Dickens’ humor is radiant and benevolent. Some nations have more humor than wit; others more wit than humor. The Irish people are possessed of more humor than wit. If the Scotch were not so “canny” they might be more comically inclined. Ireland is truly blessed in the humor of her people, which mingles with their blood, warms their hearts, and fructifies their lives. It is anomalously strange that English literature should be so rich in wit and humor, while the mass of the English people exhibit so little of either. An old proverb says, “Laugh and grow fat.” Whether laughter superinduced by wit and humor has anything to do with adding to the longitude of some Englishmen I leave to others to answer. Says one theoretical writer on wit and humor, “Fat men are always humorous,” and he cites Falstaff as an illustration. Tom Hood is also quoted, when he says of the Australian soil that “it is so fat, that tickle it with a hoe and it will laugh with a harvest.” Shakespeare has touched this where Cæsar says:

“Let me have men about me that are fat; Sleek-headed men and such as sleep o’ nights; Yond’ Cassius has a lean and hungry look; He thinks too much: such men are dangerous. He is a great observer and he looks Quite through the deeds of men. He loves no plays; Seldom he smiles; and smiles in such a sort, As if he mock’d himself and scorn’d his spirit That could be moved to smile at anything.”

Still, I do not think that fun and fat go necessarily together. There are some persons buried in fat, of portly magnitude, and huge longitude, who scarcely ever feel the wave of laughter play upon the shore of their being. A story is told of a little child, who having heard her father relate the fact that Henry I. of England was never seen to smile after he had received the sad news of the drowning of his son in the White ship, childishly inquired as to what the king did when he was tickled? With those who have suffered bereavement and other severe afflictions we can indeed sympathize; but why men environed with sunny circumstances should wear perpetually sackcloth and ashes and a psalm-like veil over their faces, we cannot understand. True, the brightest life has gloomy hours; the most happy life has painful ones, and this is in the order of Providence and nature; but out of the cold and chilling winter comes the budding spring, the glory of summer and the strength of song. There are some, however, who would have nothing in man’s life but winter; that he must be always sad of face, of frosty manner and of doleful speech. Such persons would make the earth only a place of bondage for the living, and a place of burial for the dead;

looking to the heavens only as the roof of a workhouse or the dome of a sepulchre. Again, many people through ultra-politeness destroy that freedom of life, which is accented at times by the bright lustre of humor, or the sparkling tide of innocent mirth; they mistake gravity for etiquette, and consider all outward demonstration and enthusiasm as a violation of decent manners. In the presence of such persons it becomes embarrassing to deliver an address. They will not applaud lest it be a breach of decorum and good manners. When the great Mrs. Siddons first acted Lady Macbeth in Edinburgh, it was to an audience that seemed moveless and dumb. She was in despair. She went more zealously to work and studied some special passages, which she thought must arouse them, and gave the passages with electric passion. For a moment all was still as usual, when an old man arose in the pit and shouted, “It’s nae bad that!” The silence was broken, applause came in thunders, and ever since no national theatre has been more noisy than the Scottish. Humor without a question is national, and is less the product of education than of the inborn character of the people. It is said that no one but an Englishman could have made Douglas Jerrold’s wit, any more than any one else but Hood could have made Hood’s puns. Who but Hood could have fancied the Mrs. F, who was so very deaf that she might have worn a percussion cap and been knocked on the head without hearing it snap, and whose ear-trumpet was so wonderful, that she heard from her husband at Botany Bay? Could any one except Charles Lamb present us with that pleasing exaggeration, where he pities the solemn English ancestry, who lived before candles were common, and who, when a joke was cracked in the dark, had to feel around for the smile? There is too an American humor, distinctly national, indigenous to our racy cousins across the line, and eminently illustrative of the amusing faculty of the American people. It matters not whether it be by the legislature or by the hearth, in the newspaper or on the stage, in the car or in the steamer, the American race cheers its anxiety by humor so peculiar as to make a school of its own, which is marked by a dignity of philosophy worthy of a careful and studious enquiry. It is said that the American humor is entirely made up of the comical—a slashing humor which will sacrifice feeling, interest, sociability and morality for its joke; a towering humor that will one day make fun of all the rest of the world. The pretensions of others even amongst themselves afford excellent subjects for the laughter and jeers of the American people. As that classical and inimitable wag, Saxe, sings:

Depend upon it my snobbish friend,  
Your family thread you can’t ascend,  
Without good reason to apprehend,  
You may find it waxed at the further end,  
By some plebeian vocacion;  
Or, worse than that, your boasted line  
May end in a loop of stronger twine,  
That plagued some worthy relation.

Josh Billings too hits this well when he says that with some people who brag of ancestry, their great trouble is their great descent. True, there is no dignity of literature in the shrewd and practical humor of Billings; but in his species of drollery we can see the pucker of his mouth, the elfish twinkle of his eye, and the inward chuckle which has no outward sign. Aside from the fun contained in his bad orthography, there is much original humor in his droll sayings, which have recently begun to be largely appreciated. What humor is disguised when he says that wealth won’t make a man virtuous, but there ain’t anybody who wants to be poor just for the purpose of being good; where he says that one hornet if he felt well could break up a camp meeting. To this list he afterwards added, “My name will go down to the fewter coupled with the hornet; we will be twins in posterity.” I think the most refined and sparkling humorist we have ever had in America was Washington Irving. His Knickerbocker and other works abound in humor of the choicest kind, still he cannot very well be considered as a representative of American humor. He is too cosmopolitan. He is not to America what Richter is to Germany, or Dickens is to England. In fact few of the American humorists are strictly national. Perhaps Russell Lowell, in his character of Hosea Biglow, is more truly national than any other American writer.

But we cannot find American humor alone in books. We must enter the realms of Mrs. Partington, Josh Billings, Nasby, Max Adeler, Twain, Bret Harte and the many others, whose jets of fun bathe the American fields of literature with a bright and sparkling spray. There are few of the American humorists so superlatively grotesque as Artemus Ward. Though he lacks the pointed wit of Holmes or Saxe, next to Mark Twain and Bret Harte, Artemus Ward hit the very midriff of American humor. Who can ever forget how he won his Betsy Jane—The embarrassing picture which he drew of the situation of the lovers? “We sat there on the fence a-swinging our feet to and fro, blushin’ as red as the Baldwinsville skool-house when it was first painted, and looking very simple I make no doubt. My left hand was ockepied in ballunsin myself on the fence, while my rite was wounded lovingly round her waste.” Such humor as the above belongs eminently to the grotesque. Another quality of American humor is colossal hyperbole. In fact it is well nigh impossible to have American humor without the element of exaggeration. This is particularly a characteristic of Mark Twain’s humor. What quaint conceit was that which so puzzled Twain, as to what is going to be done with the dead who are

petrified at the resurrection! He concludes that they are to be polished! However, he thought his judgment might be erroneous, as he had had no experience yet in resurrections.

What could be more comically magnificent than Twain’s mourning over the supposed grave of his ancestor Adam? “Noble old man—he did not live to see his child; and I—I—I, alas! did not live to see him. Weighed down by sorrow and disappointment he died before I was born; but let us try to bear it with fortitude. Let us trust he is better off where he is. Let us take comfort in the thought that his loss is our eternal gain.” There is another embodiment of humor in what boys term “sells,” and this characteristic is found largely in the Yankee trader. It matters not what the nature of his business he is determined to secure a profit. This propensity is portrayed in the story of Sam Jones. That worthy we are told called at the store of a Mr. Brown with an egg in his hand and wanted to “dicker” it for a darnin’-needle. This done, he asks Mr. Brown if he “isn’t going to treat.” “What, on that trade?” “Certainly, a trade is a trade, big or little.” “Well, what will you have?” “A glass of wine,” said Jones. The wine was poured out and Jones remarked that he preferred his wine with an egg in it. The storekeeper handed to him the identical egg which he had just changed for the darnin’-needle. On breaking it Jones discovered that the egg had two yolks. Says he, “Look here, you must give me another darnin’-needle!” With the American people there is nothing too sacred for a subject of humor. Even the awe and solemnity which death should inspire, are at times converted into subjects of humor. When the cholera was devastating New Orleans daily and hourly, a waiter ran into the bar-room of the St. Charles Hotel and gave this order in the rapid style of such characters: “Two brandy cocktails for No. 24, a gin flip for No. 26, and a coffin for No. 29. Two first in a hurry; t’other can wait.” Look at the irreverence in even the performance of the juvenile, who kneeling by his pious mother repeated the well-known child’s prayer:

“Now I lay me down to sleep,  
I pray the Lord my soul to keep;  
If I should die before I wake—  
Pop goes the weasel!”

The language of Americans is eminently superlative, and much of their humor consists in the adroit use of epithets and the expansion of well-known aphorisms with verbose windings. The old saying, “None so deaf as them that wont hear,” obtains with the Americans: “No persons are obtuse in their auricular apprehension equal to those who repudiate vocal by adverse inclinations.” “Talk about your Vesuve,” said an American to a Neapolitan, “Niag’ll put her out in three minutes.” Who can beat an American in telling a whopping lie, showing both invention and sublime complacency? Take the story of General Dawson, illustrative of the laziness of a class of Virginians: On one occasion he happened across the Pennsylvania line into a little village of Virginia. He was in the midst of a group around the tavern. While treating and talking, a procession approached which looked like a funeral. He asked who was to be buried?

“Job Dowling,” said they.  
“Poor Job!” sighed the General. “So poor Job is dead, is he?”  
“No he ain’t dead zactly,” said they.  
“Not dead—not d—. Yet you are going to bury him!”

“Fact is, General, he has got too infernal all-fired lazy to live. We can’t afford him any more. He’s got so lazy that the grass began to grow over his shoes—so everlastin’ lazy that he put out one of his eyes to save the trouble of winkin’ when out a gunnin’.”

“But,” says the General, “this must not be. It will disgrace my neighbourhood. Try him a while longer, can’t you?”

“Can’t; too late—coffin cost one dollar and a quarter. Must go on now.”

About this time the procession came up and halted, when the General proposed that if they would let Job out he would send over a bag of corn. On this announcement the lid of the coffin opened and Job languidly sat up; the cents dropped from his eyes as he asked,

“Is the corn shelled, General?”  
“No, not shelled.”  
“Then,” said Job, as he lazily lay down, “go on with the funeral.”

A large element of American wit and humor finds its way into the Legislature. How often has a member of the American Congress, in order to defeat a proposed measure in the House, attacked it with the weapon of ridicule and the sharp arrows of wit? It is an English poet who says:—

“For he who does not tremble at the sword,  
Who quails not with his head upon the block,  
Turn out a jest against him loses heart;  
The shafts of wit slip through the stoutest mail;  
There is no man alive who can live down  
The unextinguishable laughter of mankind.”

If variety be the spice of life, wit and humor are the salt of it. It would be difficult to maintain mental and social life without wit and humor, which are not only its salt, but also the most pungent of the spices which season its variety. American humor lights up the face of the American republic with a perennial smile; it peeps through the columns of the Detroit Free Press, the Danbury News, the Burlington Hawkeye, and a host of other racy papers; it cheers the social gathering, and in the words of Josh Billings, chases laughter to the surface of the face to have a good time.

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T. O’HAGAN.