

Laughing at Life

By GEORGE EDGAR

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IN previous articles we traced our young people from the days of adolescence to the time when they exist in a busy world, as responsible units, and have a stake in the great business of life. We have laughed with them in the "Peacock" stage, followed them tenderly through "Love's Fragrant Illusions," poked fun at the "Engaged Girl" and the "Monotony of Weddings," the humour of the first "Golden Year," and the quaint twelve months of veneration which follows the appearance of the first baby. Looking back, I fear me, some of my readers may consider their author is wholly cynical. Between us, you, dear reader, and myself as author, we have poked fun at many comedies verging on the commonplace, though the subjects of our mirth really represent the only affairs of moment in the great business of living. And yet, while we have had our fun by the way, our laughter is by no means heartless. We have tried to laugh with these foolish young people, busily creating new lamps for old, visualizing fresh worlds to conquer, in which we did battle more years ago than some of us care to remember. After all, we have all been young, and we know the thrill in the comedy and perhaps the tear ever lurking behind the gentle laughter. Our laughter is the envy of those who have left youth's fragrant illusions behind for those who blow the same bubbles over again and see new colour and charm in the drifting, short-lived, iridescent films.

At the Gateway to Middle Age.

Let us be quite honest with ourselves. We who have laughed over the comedies of the commonplace are presumably getting on or we should treat the subject of our mirth with profound seriousness. We perhaps tread sadly on the forties leading through hopeless middle age to the lean and slippered era of the almost helpless pantaloons. We are ceasing to joy in our personal appearance. A crease in the freshly tailored trousers and a new necktie, a curl of the hair and some vanity in the shape of a bow no longer set our hearts dancing. What HE said and how SHE looked are not matters of moment any longer unless we talk the language of parents, and record the sayings of our latest born. Our babies have probably grown up, and now prove shrewd critics of their parents. We have fought our social battle in the world, have had our hours of triumph, and at the gateway to middle age possess the painful knowledge of the coming losing days. We are aged and scarred, veterans in the divine comedy of human living, dull players and slow, case-hardened as we fumble about with an old game. We have the tendency to stand aside, spectators of the moving drama, and laugh at the great comedy. And laughing, in our effort to be honest with ourselves, I think we realize every note of laughter possesses the quality in all great humour which brings it so near to tears. We laugh, perhaps, because if we could not laugh, the rest would be tears. We smile upon the great comedy so that we may abstain from perpetual weeping.

The Enchanted Past.

Yes, we have laughed. And at forty there is only room for laughter. We dare not to face any other emotion, so poor is our estate. Yet we laugh because we, too, have lived; and because we would forget we are not still living at the flood-tide of existence. The little people who play the great comedy of life afresh! Ourselves were once the little people, discovering all the appalling humour in life. We curled our hair and painted our cheeks, tripped forth in giggles of dubious value, joy in our hearts, and as keen about our progress through life as a country girl dancing along to her first fairing. We have built castles in the air, for a company of two, and even tried to establish them on the earth as fit ar-

hours for the deathless love story. We have heard the birth cry of the first child, watched the rosebud grow to flowering stage, heard the wee mannikin lisp his first spoken phrase, felt the subtle tendrils he is ever ready to bind round our hearts. Ah, yes! We know just what he is. And we have fought, profitlessly may be, for our place in the sun, and, striving for recognition, have perchance found the harvest to be but the fruit of the Dead Sea. In all these impulses we have joyed; in leaving them behind, we have suffered. The state of youth is doubly gracious. It blesses both those who live in the present and those who live in the past. And even though we may be older, living in the past, the balance of joy is with us in watching the joy of the coming generation, always at our heels. Life holds up the mirror again so we may once more see ourselves walking through the enchanted past. In some aspects the second blessing is greater than the first.

All the World Belongs to the Young.

Laugh! Yes, let us laugh at the little people, as our elders laughed before us. Such humour softens our infirmities. I would not lose one dear curl in youth's nodding head; one glance of her bright, smiling eyes; one dear pressure of her infinite power to caress. After all, who has to give just the precious thing youth offers? The power to make life one glad song vanishes as she distributes her joys. As a spectator, hopelessly on the shelf, I am come to the thought that all the world belongs to the young; that all the music in life is sung by lisping lips. Take out just the comedies we have called commonplace, and the world's routine would be drear, indeed. Take out all the indiscretions of youth and life would become a charnel-house of grim endeavour. Better by far to grow old laughing in the company of youth and admiring their imperfect perfections than to approach the three-score years and ten, as the companion of aging people who dwell upon their own infirmities. Up to forty we may creep forward to the future, grabbing at happiness. After forty it is far better, still searching for happiness, to grope backwards into the past and to find, recreated in the lives of others, the joys withering in our aging selves.

Having laughed at the comedies of the commonplace, and, taking stock of ourselves after our superior endeavour, we may consider just what we have won—and all that we have lost. All we have won consists in remembering just the things over which we have been laughing; all the things we have lost are the commonplace comedies youth enjoys. By apologies we make reparation for our laughter. The aged, laughing at youth, but take upon themselves the grin of the skeleton at the feast. Because we have laughed we are skeletons at the feast. Yet youth, scarcely tolerant of our laughter, should have a care for our poor, creaking bones. After all, we were the people who mattered a generation ago. We paid for our knowledge with our lives and paid freely. All we have left is the certainty that our payment made the comedies of the youth of the moment possible and even perennial.

A Plea for Mercy.

Indeed, our laughter is a plea for mercy, and not an apology. Youth does not quite understand. Proud in the possession of the right to discover, youth will never quite appreciate how much is implied by the self-abnegation of those who step aside. Only when the first baby comes to the perfect home peopled by two are the proud parents given a glimmering hint of the debt they owe to the preceding generation. Only when other children have come and grown into players of the eternal comedies of the commonplace do they realize how, as well-graced performers, they must reluctantly take themselves from the centre of the

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