

HAPPY ANSWERS IN LITERATURE

OLD WITTICISMS WORTH PRESERVING.

From London Standard.

Mr. Samuel Weller's memorable evidence on a certain breach of promise trial is probably a "record" for the greatest number of happy answers in the shortest time; but there are authenticated instances of actual utterances which certainly rival them in brilliance and appropriateness. The law courts, as may be imagined, furnish their full quota, but many are, perforce, unappreciable by those unacquainted with the technicalities or the "argot" of the forum. Still, Lamb's chaffing description of a friend's maiden brief as the "First Great Cause, least understood," is comprehensible enough, as is the quiet, acquiescent, "That is so, my Lord," of the barrister to whom an irate Judge had just observed, "I can't give you brains, Mr. So-and-So." "I, myself, have two small manors, my lord," said a very ill-bred pompous counsel, to illustrate a question of property law. "We all know that, Mr. Kewsey," observed the Judge, with suave courtesy, and a smile of delight ran round the assembled bar. "Look at me, sir, and attend to what I shall ask you," thundered a learned counsel whose unfortunate "homeliness" of feature had gained him the sobriquet of the "Veiled Prophet." "This is an English court," rejoined the witness, quietly, "and you have no right to impose torture before putting the question." Prisoners, too, have a fair proportion of happy "answers" credited to them. Of these, perhaps the best known are that of the man who when asked if he pleaded "guilty or not guilty," replied that he couldn't say till he had heard the evidence; and the naive response of the prisoner to the usual question before sentence, "Have you anything to say, prisoner, before sentence is pronounced upon you?" "It's very kind of your Honor, and if it's quite agreeable to the court, I should like to say 'Good evening.'" On one occasion counsel in a certain drainage case submitted that the plaintiffs, the Sewage Localization Company, had "no 'locus standi' in this court." "Heaven forbid!"

was the fervent ejaculation of the learned Judge. Something akin to this was the answer of the Judge when complaint was made that a luckless process-server had been compelled to swallow the writ he had endeavored to serve. "I hope," said his lordship gravely, "that the writ was not made returnable in this court."

The "happy answers," owing their point to Biblical or ecclesiastical allusions, are still more numerous, but in many cases are somewhat too audacious for print. "He is a regular St. Paul," was the final eulogy made by an enthusiastic friend of a certain needy clergyman whose chronic impecuniosity had brought him into painfully frequent familiarity with the various processes of the law for the recovery of debts. "Yes," said the bishop, whose assistance was being solicited; "quite so. I see—'in prisons oft'!" The pardonable, but injudicious, enthusiasm of some clergymen over their musical services has given rise to many smart sayings, which are, at any rate, "ben trovato." None, perhaps, is better than the familiar one of the exasperated visitor, who, after being made to listen in torment to Gregorian chants cruelly murdered, was told that, according to tradition, those chants owed their origin to King David himself. The visitor, rendered reckless by his misery, retorted that he had often wondered why Saul threw that javelin at the royal Psalmist, but he quite understood now. Another clergyman, whose musical ambition was not tempered by prudence, took advantage of the presence of his bishop to put his village choir through an elaborate performance of vocal gymnastics, for which they were totally unfit. "Well, my lord," he inquired, eagerly, after the service, "what did you think of the singing?" "My dear sir," was the episcopal reply, "I have never till now appreciated the wisdom of the rubric which distinguishes between 'choirs and places where they sing.'" Scarcely less severe was the bishop's contribution to the chorus of ill-judged praise over the performances of a choir which, to his critical ear, had not mastered the rudiments of time. "So sweet," said one; "so devotional," purred another; "so hearty and Scriptural," lisped a third. "Very," agreed the bishop, blandly; "indeed, it reminds me of the psalm where it says,