

THE HUMORIST AT THE BREAKFAST TABLE.



I SUPPOSE you have seen something in the papers from time to time about the 'Sikkim Expedition.' It is evidently a case of letting slip the 'dogs of war.' Improvement on Shakespeare—cry 'Sikkim' and let slip the dogs of war. They will probably make the enemy—whoever they are—sick."

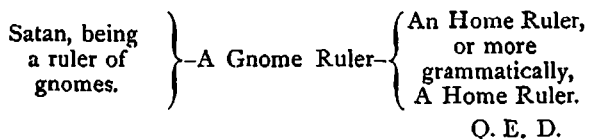
"Can't make 'em much sicker than your jokes," said Smart Alick.

"I hear that Dr. Wild has been alluding to the Home Rule movement as a satanic conspiracy," I resumed; "there is force in the observation. I am not unfavorable to the Gladstonian policy, but all who believe in the existence of his satanic majesty must admit that he is a *gnome ruler*."

Nobody seemed to catch on for half a minute, but finally the law student who was struggling with a tough steak, paused long enough in the masticatory process to emit a faint gurgle of appreciation.

"I'm bound you shall thoroughly understand that joke even if I have to make a diagram of it, for I laid awake nearly an hour last night getting it into shape. In the absence of a blackboard I must ask you, Bidelina, to be kind enough to get me a sheet of foolscap from the escrutoire."

Having obtained which I produced the following diagram:



This was passed around the table and read by everybody but the Scotchman, who contemptuously waved it aside, remarking that he "didna want to fash wi' the clish-ma clavers o' siccan a doited goneril," or words to that effect. I must cultivate this Scotchman. He has an extensive vocabulary of words which are not in the dictionary and consequently have not been punned to death. He is a vein of raw material for me, so to speak.

"By the way," I resumed aloud, "Can you tell me why a camping party should always take a cautious Scotchman along? The answer, I may say, is in the Caledonian language, but the competition is open to those of all nationalities. Don't all speak at once. No, sir, that is not the answer. It is true that the wealthy owner of a private conveyance likes to have his Scotchman (his coachman), but people don't usually take carriages with them on a camping expedition. Are you ready? Well, then, a cautious Scotchman, ye ken, is sure to *tak' tent*."

"Yon's no that bad," said the Caledonian, smiling faintly. "There's some sense in that, noo."

"It's wonderful," said I, "how much the success of a joke depends on wording it rightly. The conundrum I've just exploded on you isn't exactly new, though it's quite original. I worked it off some years ago for a young society man who was going to a dinner party and wanted to amuse and astonish the company by his wit. I got up a dozen or so brand new jokes for him and a couple of original stories about Sir John Macdonald—which, between ourselves, were adapted from Rabelais—for which

he promised me five dollars, and if I remember right, paid me two. I'm always open to a deal of that kind, you know. Got to live somehow. Well, as I was saying, this young society man fired off the joke about the Scotchman and the camping expedition. He put it in this shape: Why is it a good idea to take a cautious Scotchman along when you go on a camping excursion? Because he'll bring a tent with him. Wet blanket over the company and irretrievable confusion and break down of the perpetrator when asked to explain.

"Again I remember once making a hit at the National Club, by saying that Col. Denison's wild talk about rallying round the old flag to oppose Reciprocity was a *flagrant* piece of buncombe—emphasis on the 'flag,' of course. Another fellow infringed my patent and tried to make an audience laugh by remarking that Denison's rant about the flag was all rot. A man who is not thoroughly versed in the *technique* of the art, as it were, is no more to be trusted with a loaded joke than a farm laborer is with a forty-horse-power engine. Its delicate mechanism is apt to be hopelessly ruined by careless handling.

"Allow me to pause in my remarks sufficiently to finish my steak. I always do pity those unfortunate martyrs who were 'brought to the stake.' They must have had a tough time."



WHY MONTREAL GOES SLOWLY.