

PATHOS AND HUMOR IN LITERATURE.

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HUMOR and pathos are the light and shade of literature. Not the brightest light nor the deepest shade, but something between the extremes. The brightest light is undoubtedly the lightning flash of wit; the deepest shade, the black, repellent terror of tragedy. True humor never flashes, it flickers and plays with lambent flame, like the faint sheet lightning of summer, intermittently illuminating the horizon of being. So pathos never repels or terrifies. It is attractive even in its sadness. Tragedy strikes like wit, in sudden blows; 'tis the uplifted knife, the descending axe, the rushing flood, the martyr's stake. Pathos, like humor, lingers through clauses, paragraphs and chapters, yet, shocking no sense, leaves us the better and the wiser for its discipline. What would our literature—what would any literature—be without pathos, without humor? Wisdom it might enshrine, eloquence and wit; yet it would not be life, and not being life it would not be appreciated by the masses who live, and who delight to hear themselves and their virtues and weaknesses portrayed.

"Man is the animal that laughs," a sufficiently good definition I opine. The ape may grin and mow and gibber; the parrot may shout and shriek and squall; but man alone in animated nature can shake his sides in unrestrained merriment, to feel benefited by the exercise. What is it then that makes man laugh? It is his innate sense of the ridiculous, *i.e.*, the humorous. Satire, however enjoyable in itself, seldom appeals to the risible faculties. Wit and repartee, however clever and appropriate, need wrinkle no visage with the ripple of mirth.

'Tis the intellect that appreciates in either case, not the sense. But broad humor tickles the whole individual, and the whole individual must respond to the prompting. Like honest Pluto, the retriever, when pleased he must wag all over. In this capability of appreciating the absurd man is unique. Suppose that mongrel No. 1 meets mongrel No. 2 in headlong flight with a frying pan rattling in his wake, does mongrel No. 1 show his appreciation of the joke by a grin? Not he. If No. 2 stays in his Ixion-like course for a moment, No. 1 may possibly sniff the pan in hopes of catching some faint aroma, relic of juicy steak or savoury chop, but grin? No. It is more likely a snarl or a snap. But let young Hopeful No. 1 meet young Hopeful No. 2 with a big chalk face outlined on the back of his jacket, and what is the result? Instantaneous explosions, to which the might of a torpedo were nothing. The pointed finger, the expansive mouth, the eye "in a fine frenzy rolling," and the inevitable "Ha! ha! ha!" of unrestrained merriment. Happy mortal that man is, that can kill grief with a gibe, and lay the ghost of despondency with a guffaw!

No, we cannot do without humor. We could dispense, perhaps, with satire, which cuts oftener than it amuses; with wit, which blinds as often as it pleases. But obliterate humor, and we consign to forgetfulness some of the best and kindest and truest things that have ever been spoken or written. Nor could we do without pathos in life or fiction. An eternal simper would soon become monotonous; our aching sides must rest for very rest's sake. In life, as