

## The Art of Writing Jokes.

Sometimes I ask my friends in business if they like their work, and when they reply, as they almost invariably do, that only the need of the almighty dollar compels them to stick to it, then I am glad that I don't feel that way about my work, however poor it may seem to others.

I think it is a good thing if a man can love his work, and when I think how much I love mine and have been loving it for the past ten years—ever since I sent off my first piece of verse and saw it in print the next day—why it makes me think that it must be a good sort of work after all.

Then again I think of what Mr. Olemens said some time ago, that there were but twenty-six (I think his number was twenty-six) original jokes in the world, and, remembering that I have written something like 12,000 of them since I began, it makes me shudder to think how many times I must have written the same joke over again; and I wonder seriously if people have enjoyed reading them as much as I have writing them.

Yet I think that to the artists most of the credit of bringing out our ideas belongs. In writing a joke the picture, the situation, must always first be seen in my mind, and many and many a time I have been surprised to see in the illustration of my joke precisely the same picture that my imagination had wrought when I was writing it. When a joke is brought out in this way the varying expressions on the faces of the characters depicted, if there is any humor in it, will show tenfold.

A lot of jokes, dialogues, witticisms, many of them execrable puns or containing some flippant cynicism on sacred subjects, are at the most tiresome and unprofitable reading, but the dialogue that has been thought out, each word placed where it will do the most good, containing an idea that strikes right home at some human weakness, and this idea illustrated by an artist who brings out every nice shade of expression—it seems to me that this is more or less a work of art; and this, in spite of the various critics who have referred to the joke writer as being outside the pale of literature.

There are enough poor jokes, but the good ones will stand, dwarflike though they be, alongside some of the essays that have been written by more serious philosophers.

I think Phil Welch was the best joke writer we ever had, and I love to read over his work now, for it was invariably clean and wholesome. I have no patience with witticisms on subjects that ought not to be jeered at. There is enough to make fun of without raising the coffin lid. Neither do I believe in attacking a class unless they are so hopelessly bad that they ought to be attacked. Every work has a temptation, and the humorist too often allows himself to touch ground that he ought to avoid. He can be witty without being vulgar and amusing without being irreverent.

I write to make money, as every other writer does, whether he admits it or not, and I try to make all the money I can. If I used the money unwisely I should consider that I was prostituting my brain. But so long as the earnings from his pen are well spent, I consider that every writer need not be ashamed of selling his inspiration at the highest price. I do not believe in art for art's sake, and I believe the best art is produced by the greatest number of incentives to its growth, and poverty has never been the least of these.

I work constantly from the time that I get up until I go to bed, and turn everything to account. The more work I can do in a day the happier I am, and I try to keep my enthusiasm at the highest pitch. My rest is change and my work is play, and what a playground the world is, anyway!—Tom Masson in the New York World.

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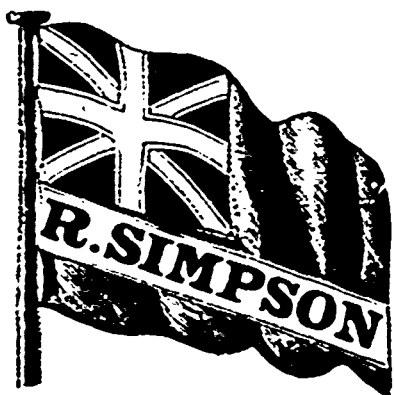
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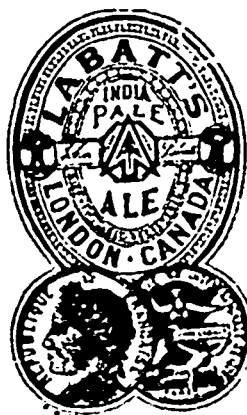
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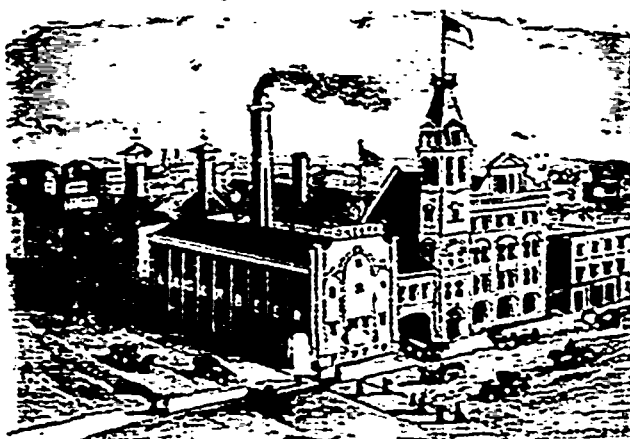
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