THE GROWTH OF HUMANISM IN GEORGIAN POETRY

AN ATTEMPT TO PROVE THAT
THE BEST GEORGIAN POETRY OF THE 20TH CENTURY
MANIFESTS A SPIRIT OF SYMPATHY AND KINDNESS
WHICH HAS NOT EXISTED PREVIOUSLY

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Master of Arts

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by
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FOREWORD

WHAT THIS THESIS PURPORTS TO ATTEMPT

Volumes have been written about the nature and causes of laughter. Philosophers, psychologists, scientists, and other deep thinkers have seriously considered the subject of humour; and in their seeking, many of them have resembled a surgeon trying to trap the laugh in the throat of a clown. Of those I have read, a great number have apparently been unable either to see or to enjoy a joke; and their treatises have been, to my mind, of a dullness exactly proportionate to the intensity of their efforts. As an entymologist, himself unable to fly and completely undesirous of doing so, may study the delicate and sepulcrous flight of a butterfly, they have analysed the origins and the organs of laughter; and have formulated theories and come to conclusions why, how, and when human beings make silly faces and emit peculiar noises, and enjoy their foolishness all the while; theories and conclusions which, for the most part, are contradictory and confusing. The authors are, in the main, according to J.I.F. Grotz, monotheorists. "They do not," he says, "agree among themselves what the formula for laughter should be, but with one accord, they turn away from pluralism in this branch of aesthetics at least, being altogether persuaded that laughter must have one cause and one cause only."[1]

Other writers, however, witty men, possessed of an hilarious sense of humour, have made of the subject witty and hilarious reading.

Because of my lack of qualifications in philosophy, psychology, science, pedagogy, and even, perhaps, in thinking, this study will make no attempts along these lines. Dealing with what is commonly called a light subject, it begs leave to use a light touch, and it pleads pardon for a levity of thought that can see something funny in the serious consideration of laughter. It will make an examination of some outstanding humorous lyrical poetry, essaying to prove the thesis that in this most unkind 20th century, the creators of the best of the genre show a kindness, a sympathy, a forbearance; in short, a humanity greater than any evidenced before, a humanity that has never been evidenced before.

The inclusion, in this study, of comic poetry as written for the theatre would widen the field beyond all hope of cultivation, so comedy has been neglected, although it cannot altogether be ignored. Similarly, satirical poetry offers material for any number of theses, and will not, therefore, be discussed in detail; any reference to satire will be superficial. Finally, although England and most English-speaking countries are separated from their neighbours by a considerable expanse of water, they cannot (and surely should not) isolate themselves in thought. A gardener will find in his rose patch a few gentians, lilies, or tulips. If there are gentians, lilies, or tulips, in the gardens nearby.

Accordingly, this work, while concentrating on humorous verse written in English, will be forced to touch on that of other tongues as background, and as comparative and illustrative material.

Footnote to Foreword.

1 J.W.T. Craig, M.A. The Psychology of Laughter and Comedy (George Allen and Unwin, Ltd., London, 1923) p. 70.

INTRODUCTION

A QUICK GLANCE AT HUMOUR; ITS THEORY OR THEORIES

"_____ the ridiculous," said Aristotle, some time around the middle of the fourth century, B.C., "is but a part of the ugly. It is that kind of failing and deformity which is not painful or injurious to others, such as we may see, for example, in the comic mask. It is ugly and distorted without causing pain."[1]

Plato had previously examined the tenet that what was funny was ugly or out of the ordinary. In Philebus, he had made Socrates declare that the ridiculous arises from self-ignorance of 1) one's own property, 2) one's own physical characteristics, and 3) one's own mental qualities.[2]

"The passion of laughter," this was the view of Hobbes in 1650, "proceedeth from a sudden conception of some ability in himself that laugheth. Also men laugh at the infirmities of others, by comparison wherewith their own abilities are set off and illustrated."[3]

David Hume, however, a century later, in discussing the seductious quality of fiction, indirectly granted a useful function to humour, when he said, "Some indulgence, however, to lying or fiction is given in humorous stories, because it is there really agreeable and entertaining; and truth is not of any importance."[4]

As recently as the first part of the 19th century, William Hazlitt made this comment, "Wit and humour (comparatively speaking, or taking the reference to judge of the gradations by) appeal to our

indolence, our vanity, our weakness, and insensibility."[5] And Henri Bergson decreed, "In this sense, laughter cannot be absolutely just. Nor should it be kind-hearted, either. Its function is to intimidate by humiliating."[6]

The conception that laughter is provoked only by the ugly, the distorted or the deformed, and that the enjoyment of laughter follows only a smug appreciation of self-superiority, is, I shall try to prove, not only antique, but antiquated.

"Humour is play. Humour is being in fun," says today's writer on the subject, Max Eastman,[7] and Charles S. Brooks adds, "Real humour is primarily human -- or divine, to be exact -- and after that the fun may follow naturally in its order."[8]

Twenty-three centuries of comic literature stand between Aristotle's observation that people laugh when they see ugly things and Eastman's dictum about being "in fun." More than four centuries and a whole new conception of mankind lie between Hobbes' opinion of superiority and Brooks' "humour has a kindly eye and a comfortable girth."[9]

It will, of course, take more than the comments of a few philosophers or critics to prove my point. I should be blind or mad if I maintained that cruelty, contempt, and malice had disappeared from humorous poetry. I, who have lived in the days of the concentration camp and the third degree, cannot claim that my generation has eliminated all but the sweet and sunny. What I am trying to prove, perhaps, is that there is more fair play today. Some of the traditional jokes may still be current; many of the traditional butts are still mocked, but for different reasons. "Deformities of nature" are no longer as

amusing in themselves as they were in 350 B.C., but they become so if they are the result of or the revelation of perversity, stupidity, cupidity, or some other avoidable fault on the part of their hosts.

"Madam, the most extraordinary thing about this town," says F.M. Scott, in the traditionally cruel manner of the wit who makes fun of a natural deformity,

"is the shape of your legs."[11]

The lady, however, would have spared herself the wound in her weak spot if she had not displayed her deformity by "canvas knickers."[11]

A cripple today is not considered funny merely because he is a cripple; but if he becomes involved in a brawl and deals his opponent a sharp crack with his crutch, our mirth, aroused by the shock of the unexpected, is enhanced by our sympathy for the underdog and by our delight in justice, poetic or otherwise.

The cry of the defeatists that human nature does not change is, history has shown us, false.[12] That it has changed for the better in all aspects is questionable, but that there have been distinct steps forward in sympathy and kindliness is proved, for example, by the laws against cruelty. People no longer buy and sell their fellow men, nor can they mistreat them under the law. They may not mistreat[13] even their own offspring, in the name of discipline or anything else.

Thus, while a kindly child-lover like Lewis Carroll could find and give amusement by writing of the unreasonable punishment of children in a purely ridiculous way:

> Speak roughly to your little boy
> And beat him when he sneezes.
> He only does it to annoy,
> Because he knows it teases.[14]

such a verse would be even more ridiculous appearing for the first time in present-day Oxford, where the unnatural parent would be denounced upon by the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children.

There are also societies for the prevention of cruelty to animals; and a man can be reprimanded, fined, or even jailed for overworking a horse, beating a dog, or hanging a cat. So, happy in the knowledge that we are doing the right thing by our animals and that any actual mistreatment will be punished, we need waste no indignation on John Gilpin's horse, and may enjoy a touch of gentle satire in such verses as

> Be kind to the hummed, that genial bird,
> And honour its clothe and eggs,
> And when the poor elephant suffers from bile
> Then tenderly lace up his stays.

or

> Speak gently to the herring and kindly to the calf.

Gladiator combat and the feats of man-eating lions have never been popular entertainment in the countries whose verse I am discussing; bull-baiting and cock-fighting have been abolished. Imbeciles and the insane are no longer thrown in jail, nor is their appearance, per se, the occasion for laughter. Laughter comes, to be sure, if they make some inane remark, but it will be doubled if they say something bright or perspicacious. The popularity of Mr. George Formby's films, in which invariably a simple or feeble-minded character, by accident or by a display of mother-wit, finishes a series of mishaps triumphantly with the upper hand and the pretty girl, is surely evidence of our affection rather than our contempt for persons presumably inferior to ourselves.

There has been an astounding change in our attitude to old age. Grecian and Elizabethan drama made comic capital of the inevitable doddering old man: the old tutor, the Gallerman, the Polonius. The sentimental 19th century [30] regarded him as inherently noble. Today the phenomenon can be taken rationally, and the heartiest applause is to be evoked by poking fun at one's own (and therefore everybody's) overwhelming senility.

Improved means of transportation, increased knowledge of other parts of the world, and the interchange of ideas have standardized to some extent customs and clothing, and have got white people used to the appearance of their little brown, yellow, black, or speckled brothers. Not only 150 years ago, William Hazlitt relates, "We laugh at the dress of foreigners and they at ours. Three chimney sweepers meeting three Chinese in Lincoln's Inn Fields, they laughed at one another till they were ready to drop down. Country people laugh at a person because they never saw him before. Any one dressed in the height of fashion, or quite out of it, is equally an object of ridicule." [31]

It is true that the country bumpkin still sniggers at the city slicker or the crazy foreigner. I myself, not so long ago, because of what Europe and America considered a smart hat, caused three Japanese peasants to guffaw, point, and make faces at me; while they could regard with equanimity the dignified gentleman wearing a dark kimono short enough to show four inches of long grey woolen underwear tucked into his tabi, [32] his bald head protected by a fedora, his protruding teeth almost invisible because of their gleaming gold

and

filliance. The country bumpkin maligner, yes, but their number are decreasing, and no writer of Hamlet's stature in 1958 would say "no" in the same connection. For the educated man will no more laugh at a foreigner because he is foreign than he will call an oriental a heathen Chinee, a Frenchman a frog, or an Italian a dago. And his forbearance does not stem only from his good breeding; he just does not find foreigners ridiculous.

Again Hamlet said, "One fell course of the instances is distress with which we cannot sympathize from its absurdity or insignificance." This statement is understandable from a man who lived in a world where, doubtless because of "absurdity or insignificance", a serving-maid, were she twelve or seventy-two, worked sixteen hours a day for little more than the scraps she was fed, in a house whose domestic design was incredibly inconvenient; where a child of seven or eight could labour in a mill until his soft bones were warped and his bright eyes dimmed, yet his parents were grateful for the employment that put a few extra pence in the family purse; where an honest man could be jailed for debts he could not avoid; where the diseased and dying were left to the care of ignorant, drunken old women.

That the best humorous verse of the 20th century is characterized not by a sense of superiority, not altogether by the observation of ugliness or even of absurdity, not by a malicious enjoyment of the discomfiture of others (insignificant or not), but by a good-natured humanism and kindliness; that savage humour is written not only when it bubbles up in invective against personal enemies, but also when it is aroused by the sight or thought of shared follow-men; that a real mirth can be born of spontaneous sympathy and love: this is my thesis.

NOTES TO INTRODUCTION

1 Aristotle, Poetics, 1449 a 30 (Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1909)

2 Plato, Philebus, 48-50, H.A. Grant, Ancient Rhetorical Theories of the Laughable, (University of Wisconsin Studies in Language and Literature, No. 21.) Chapter I.

3 Thomas Hobbes, "The Answer to the Preface to Gondibert", Vol. IV, Works, (John Bohn, London, 1851) Chapter IX, Section 18, p. 466.

4 David Hume, "Essays and Treatises on Several Subjects," Vol. II (Bell and Bradfute, London, 1870)

5 William Hazlitt, "Lecture on the English Comic Poets," Vol VI Works, Centenary Edition, (Howe, London.) p. 89

6 Henri Bergson, Laughter, (Macmillan, London, 1911) p. 106.

7 Max Eastman, The Enjoyment of Laughter, (Hamish Hamilton, London, 1937) p. 31.

8 Charles A. Brooks, "On the Difference between Wit and Humour," from Chimmey Pot Papers, quoted in Readings for Writing, ed. Frederick and Hunt, (D.C. Crofts, New York, 1946), p. 150.

9 Ibid, pages 155. ...

10 See para 1, page vii.

11 F.R. Scott, "Tourist Time," Overture, (Ryerson, Toronto).

12 Cf. D.S. Cameron, n.d., Life is for Living, (Macmillan & Co., New York, 1940), Chapter XII, page 108: "The assertion that human nature cannot change is related to that family of particularly unpleasant myths which the moralists invented to excuse their own failure to deal with human nature.

15 Five years ago, a London woman was brought into court for burning her little boy on the leg with a cigarette because he had done the same thing to his baby sister. The old doctrine of an eye for an eye is no longer operative, the magistrate told her.

16 Lewis Carroll, Alice in Wonderland. (Modern Library)

17 There are branches throughout the United Kingdom.

18 Gen Folk Records, Fimlipes and Kenora.

19 William Cowper, "John Gilpin" The Book of Humorous Verse, compiled by Carolyn Wells, (Garden City, New York) p. 864.

20 "Kindly Advice," Wells, op. cit. p. 880.

21 J. Ashby-Sterry, "Kindness to Animals," Wells, op. cit. p. 881.

22 A notable exception is Lewis Carroll's Father William, in Alice in Wonderland.

23 William Hamlet, op. cit. p. 8-9.

24 Japanese socks made of white piqué.

25 Hamlet, op. cit. p. 8-9.

CHAPTER I

THE PURPOSE OF HUMOROUS POETRY

It is well to begin by defining terms. This, however, I cannot do.

What is humour? What is poetry? What is humorous poetry? are questions which many have tried to answer, but which remain practically unanswerable. Speaking of wit and humour, H.W. Nobie says, "They will never be caught in the snare of definition, however skilfully set."[1] And Morris Bishop neatly and appropriately states the problem in verse:

"What is funny?" you ask, my child,
Crinkling your bright-blue eye.
"Ah, that is a curious question indeed,"
Musing, I make reply.

"Contusions are funny, not open wounds,
And automobiles that go
Crash into trees by the highwayside,
Industrial accidents, no.

"The habit of drink is a hundred percent,
But drug addiction is nil.
A nervous breakdown will get no laughs,
Insanity surely will.

"Humour, aloof from the cigarette,
Inhabits the droll cigar;
The middle-aged are not very funny;
The old and the young, they are.

"So the funniest thing in the world should be
A grandfather drunk, insane,
Maimed in a motor accident
And enduring moments pain.

"But why do you scream and yell, my child?
Here comes your mother, my honey,
To comfort you and to lecture me
For trying, she'll say, to be funny."[2]

Most writers define by differentiating between wit and humour. "Humour is the describing the ludicrous as it is in itself; wit is the exposing it, by comparing or contrasting it with something else," declared Hazlitt.[3] In this study of humour, I shall not be too nice in separating it from wit, because the two qualities are frequently inextricably twined, and much humour is extremely witty.

It has been said that humour is typical of the English -- a quality blunt, human, good-natured rather than clever, sometimes tricky, sometimes comprising horse-play, always vital; and that wit belongs to the French -- sharp, mordant, scintillating. It is significant that the English can find no satisfactory translation of "sense of humour" into French, nor of "humorous", because "gai", "plaisant", "spirituel", do not quite fill the bill. Perhaps this concentration on the witty side of the laughable is what has made Bergson insist that "indifference is its natural environment, for laughter has no greater foe than emotion. I do not mean that we could not laugh at a person who inspires us with pity, for instance, or even with affection, but in such a case we must, for a moment, put our affection out of court and impose silence upon our pity ---- the comic demands -- a momentary anesthesia of the heart."[4] He also insists that there is "hostility" in all laughter -- an assertion to which Mr. Beerbohm[5] (writing in his native language, English) takes sharp exception. In acute contrast to Bergson's theory is that of the English Professor Grant, who maintains that laughter is caused by love.

"We must be attracted by what we laugh at," he claims.[6]

The Germans find high amusement in Schadenfreude, a word which seems to defy translation. It is that form of malicious enjoyment of the discomfiture of others, especially if occasioned by oneself; it is a type of delight evoked by accident or misfortune; it is the brisk glorified; Schadenfreude indeed requires a momentary anesthesia of the heart. In its lighter, less harmful manifestations, Schadenfreude is pre-eminently illustrated by the adventures of Max[7] and Moritz,[8] whose American counterparts are the Katzenjammer Kids.[9] Other cartoons, notably some of Gilen' and those of the creator of the girls of St. Trinian's,[10] manifest this type of gleeful wickedness, but with a difference. Max and Moritz are completely realistic practical jokers; the English cartoons are based on a fantasy and an absurd exaggeration that takes them completely out of this world. When Max and Moritz hang rabbits on a line with clothespins fastening their long ears, one can feel that the furry expression on the furry faces is that of real pain as well as astonishment. Therefore, when the gentle maidens of St. Trinian's are about to perpetrate one of their horrors, (I say "about to", because the pictures do not show the finite accomplishment) the ideas are so preposterous that the diabolism melts in the ludicrous. And Gilen' little fiends are merely without a social significance, which puts them in a different category. He is reviling war when he has one tiny creature say to a tinier one, "Christmas is not like it was when I was young -- we had real tin hats, parties down the shelter, lovely boxes of anti-gas ointment to put on the soles of Auntie Aggie's shoes ----."[11]

Professor Craig avers that "It is only people with the same social heritage who laugh easily at the same kind of jokes,"[15] and many authorities agree with him that "laughter halts at national frontiers."[16] This adds an affirmative vote on the question of nationalism or racialism in humour, but it does not help me with my definition of humorous poetry. Out of a large choice, I prefer Mr. Knutson's argument that poetic humour is "...not comic verse. ...It is the imaginative realization of the ludicrous."[17]

Frankly avoiding as impossible, then, any positive definition of humorous poetry, or even any strict segregation of humour according to nationality, I should like to go on a step to the consideration of the reasons why men write it.

Horace's dictum that poetry is written either to delight or to instruct[18] has been cited so frequently that, were it not made of such stout stuff, it would have been threadbare long before today. It is still serviceable, however, although in the case of humorous poetry it must be stretched a little if it is to cover satire and invective. Moreover, it implies a deliberation that accords better with the serious than with the comic poet.

The person with a sense of humour (or that lower quality, a sense of fun) has a zest for life. He can see the amusing not only in the obvious, but also in the subtle, and perhaps even in the bitter and the pathetic.[19] To share this amusement with his friends is instinctive. In a great many cases, he is physically or psychologically incapable of keeping his mirth to himself. So the clever fellow was so possessed of his own drollness that he bought himself

many a beating by his constant playing of tricks; as Pope in childhood "lisped in numbers for the numbers came"; as Gyles Brandreth covered office memos with funny rhymes when he should have been — when he wanted to be — carrying out various clerical duties in the business world, ending himself with risible sternness.

> I sit in an office at 444 Madison Avenue,
> And say to myself, "You have a responsible job, however?"

so other humorists cannot help communicating their laughter any more than they can keep water from running through their fingers. It is a natural law they follow, one with that which makes men gregarious. The older philosophers on the subject of laughter have (I think) overlooked or underestimated spontaneity in the impulse to jest.

Publishing may be a different thing altogether. It may be merely a satisfaction of the gregarious instinct, an extension of generosity, where the humorist is willing to share his fun not only with his friends but also with a wider public; it may be a laudable desire to make a living (humour is a serious business for a great many people); or it may be, as his enemies suggest, exhibitionism or avarice. The same accusation may be levelled at any poet who allows his work to be printed. Whatever the compulsion that makes the humorist publish, however, we should be grateful to him. As one shot poised around the world, so the chuckle that greets a witticism can be repeated by generation after generation. Publication has kept Aristophanes, Chaucer, Gilbert and Sullivan from being

imprisoned in their own centuries.

This, then, seems to be the primary purpose of the humorous poet: to delight.

But laughter may wear a cap and gown and instruct, either pedagogically or morally. Rhyme is a hook which catches in the memory and deposits there the matter it rhymes about. Rhyme and metre can be employed by the teacher of almost every subject. How many Latin scholars have learned one rule by chanting.

Unus, solus, totus, ullus,
Uter, alter, neuter, nullus,
Et alius -- TAKE ITS IN THE GENITIVE AND I IN THE DATIVE?

Numerous piano students, unable to keep their right hands from knowing what their left hands are doing, have been helped in fitting triplets to two by the ineloquent.

John Sebastian Bach
Sat down on a tack,
Sat down on a tack, and said Oh!

And a tiny child will memorize the multiplication tables in no time if he is taught to sing them.

The appalling doggerel constantly sung on the radio bears witness to the effectiveness of using rhyme and metre as a rod-pointed wagon to attract the attention and remain in the memory. From this, the lowest device, comic instruction can mount to a didactic poem like Chaucer's Pardoner's Prologue and Tale, with its text (stated and, with what cleverness, illustrated and implied) of "Radix Malorum est Cupiditas."

The Pardoner's Tale, however, is much too subtle to be merely a didactic poem. It abounds in satire -- satire in the mediaeval sense and satire as we now understand it.

Satire, says the Oxford English Dictionary, is 1) a composition in which vice or folly is held up to ridicule, 2) the use of ridicule, sarcasm, or irony to expose folly. The objective of satire, according to H.B. Fowler, is the amendment of faults.[23]

Almost all the great writers have steadfastly maintained that they hate evil and wish to destroy it. There are three methods of attacking vice, corruption, or folly: 1) denunciation, 2) demonstration of sinful effects, and 3) ridicule. The first is the province of the moralists, the second that of the writers of tragic literature, and the third that of the wits and humourists. Nor must the humourists confine themselves to the smaller peccadillos and follies, as the comedies of humour have shown.

The employment of thalia as a reformer has been the excuse of comedians for the last few thousand years, when called to task for their obnoxiousness, cruelty, or vulgarity.

> It behooves the sacred chorus (said Aristophanes) and of right to them belongs,[24]
> To suggest the best advice in their utterance and their songs.

Molière, feeling that comedy ought to "entrer comme il faut dans le ridicule des hommes et ... rendre sur le théâtre les défauts de tout le monde", had one of his sensible and estimable characters suggest, "N'allons point nous appliquer nous-mêmes les traits d'une censure générale; et profitons de la leçon, si nous pouvons, sans faire semblant qu'on parle à nous."[25]

That satirical verse can be as high-minded and powerful as any other crusader must be admitted. Said Andrew Fletcher of Saltoun, "I knew a very wise man ... that ... believed that if a man were per-

mitted to make all the ballads, he need not care who make the laws of a nation."[26]

Satire can, however, as it too often does, lose sight of its noble and impersonal purpose, and train its big guns not on the abstract, but on the actual vice, corruption, or folly of some particular person.[27] The witty poem, indeed, can be used as a weapon not for the purpose of amendment, or even of defence, but of attack. To mock or discredit an enemy, to revenge some real or imagined injury, can also be purposes of humorous poetry. I prefer to call this genre, as does Mr. Fowler, invective.[28] Invective through ridicule is perhaps the cruellest of all methods of word war. In the hands of a clever writer, it is diabolically effective. Call a man a villain and you invest him with a certain glamour; prove him a fool and you ruin him. Thomas Morton, writer of the amazingly potent doggerel, "Lilibullero," boasted that by it he "sang a king out of three kingdoms."[29]

It can be proved, I think, that if a poet's purpose is to delight, to instruct, or even to amend the faults of mankind, he can do so with or without inflicting deep wounds. A little of what has been done, and how, will be the further study of this essay.

Footnotes to Chapter I

1 E.W. Noble, "Wit and Humour," Essays in Literary Interpretation (Morang and Co., Toronto, 1905.) p. 106.

2 Morris Bishop, "The Anatomy of Humour," The Pocket Book of Humorous Verse. ed. by David McCord (Pocket Books, Inc., New York, 1946) p. 140.

3 William Hazlitt, "Wit and Humour," Lectures on the English Comic Poets, Vol. VI, (Centenbury Edition, Nimmo, London) p. 15.

4 Henri Bergson, Laughter (Macmillan and Co., London, 1911) p. 4.

5 Max Eastman, The Enjoyment of Laughter, (English Hamilton, London, 1937) p. 257 et seq.

6 J.Y.T. Greig, M.A. The Psychology of Laughter and Comedy (George Allen and Unwin, Ltd., London, 1923) p.77.

7 Wilhelm Busch, Max und Moritz. (Braun und Schneider, Munchen). Date of publication not available.

8 Newspaper comic strip characters.

9 Cartoonist for the Daily Express, London.

10 Punch, English bi-monthly magazine.

11 Punch, Aldine Edition, (Geo. Bell & Sons, London, November 30, 1940.

12 Greig, op. cit., p. 71. (Geo. Bell & Sons, London, 1904)

13 Greig, op. cit., p. 92.

14 Eastman, op. cit., p. 117.

15 Hogarth, Epistle to the Press, The Great Critics, ed. Smith and Parks (W.W. Norton and Co., New York, 1939) p. 154.

16 In his essay, "On the Difference between Wit and Humour," Oliver Goldsmith, quoted in Reading for Writing, ed. Frederick and Ward, (D.C. Crofts, New York, 1946) p. 158, Charles S. Brooke says, "... a humorous man has the high gift of regarding an annoyance in the very stroke of it as another man shall regard it when the annoyance is long past."

17 See E.E. Perry, Studies in the Text History of the Life and Fables of Aesop, (Haverford, Pa., American Philological Association, 1936) p. 6.

18 Alexander Pope, "Epistle to Dr. Arbuthnot," The Poetical Works of Alexander Pope, American Publishers Corporation, New York) 1. 125.

19 Ogden Nash, "Spring Comes to Murray Hill," The Face Is Familiar, (Garden City Publishing Co., New York,1941) p. 321.

20 See, for example, E.A. Grant, Ancient Rhetorical Theories of the Laughable, (University of Wisconsin Studies in Language and Literature, No. 21) Chapter 1.

21 Three mice are twenty-seven, etc. (Tune, Home, Sweet Home - gently); Four mice are thirty-six, etc. (Tune, God Save the Queen - stirdily); Five times nine are forty-five, etc. (Tune, Yankee-Doodle-Dandy - merrily).

22 A speaker on advertising appearing before a men's club in January 1951 said that the People's Credit Jewellers had about doubled their business since putting their jingles on the air. ("People's Credit Jewelers".)

25 H.W. Fowler, Modern English Usage. (Oxford at the Clarendon Press, 1947) p. 240.

26 Aristophanes, The Frogs, tr. Frere, (Modern Library) p. 249. See also Grant, Op. cit. p. 67.

27 Molière, La Critique de l'Ecole des Femmes. (Larousse, Paris,) Scène vi.

28 Andrew Fletcher, quoted in The Home Book of Quotations, ed. Stevenson (Dodd, Mead and Co., London)

29 Augustinian, rather than Mediaeval, Satire.

30 Fowler, loc. cit.

31 See The Poems Collected, ed. Ryder Rollins (Harvard University Press, 1939). Burnet said of "Lillebullero" that "Never did so slight a thing have so great an effect." Gay introduced it into The Beggar's Opera.

CHAPTER II

CLASSIFICATION OF HUMOUR IN VERSE

The next consideration, I think, is that of a rough classification of humour in verse. Primary, perhaps, is the humour or wit of the words themselves. No comic device has had a longer history than the common pun. Aristophanes delighted in it,[1] so did the Latin comic playwrights. Shakespeare, who began his dramatic career with a five-act frolic with words,[2] never held himself aloof from punning. With his dying breath, Horatio says that tomorrow he will be "a grave man";[3] and Hamlet, his mind tense with his plan to unmask his uncle's villainy, lards his welcome to the players with double meanings.[4] Dean Swift thoroughly enjoys the game, e.g. in his "Gentle Echo".[5] Thomas Hood's name may be forgotten, but never his Tom Kettle, who

> —— was a soldier bold
> And used to war's alarms;
> But a cannon-ball took off his legs,
> So he laid down his arms.[6]

And recently, A.P. Herbert insisted that "the Hurds have a whey of their own."[7]

In addition to playing on or with words, language lovers may be sportive with rhyme. Readers duple and triple rhymes, such as

> —— whose very sight would[8]
> Entitle him Mirror of Knighthood,

provide material for merriment. Again, Dr. Swift was an adept at this art, as is seen in his celebrated

> But as to comic Aristophanes,[9]
> The rogue too vicious and too profane is,

although his polysyllabic rhymes have been criticized as forced. Coleridge quotes "your Scott's distich to the Welsh squire who had promised him a hare:

"Tell me, thou son of great Cadwallador,
Hast sent the hare? Or hast thou swallowed her?" [10]

And,

I blushed up to the hut o' me, to view that girl's anatomy. [11]

Newman Levy makes Athenaeal confess.

Retros, too, make their bid for laughter. Tenro do Force [12] like "Darius Green and his Flying Machine". "The Abscond of Kent", [13] "Take me in your Arms, Miss Honeymoony-Wilson!" "The Bonbon", [14] and [15] others, are worth reading aloud for their ingenuity, regardless of content; amusing, too, and not as easy to write as the critics make out.

I seen a dunce of a poet once, a-writin' a little book;
And hennys to me with a smile, says he, "Here's a poem, —
d'you want to look?"
And I threw my eye at the piece; says I, "What's the use of
this here rot?"
"It's a double sestina," says he, lookin' mean, "and they're
hard as the dence, that's what!" [16]

Mr. Burgess' pithy verses brings us to my next subdivision in the kit of words: the use of bad grammar or bad spelling. This will be discussed more fully in a chapter on methods.

Associated with illiterate verse is dialect. From earliest days, man has made fun of the speech of his distant cousins, whether distant by thousands of miles or only in the next county. Whether the speaker is from "Kaintuck":

You, Wi'yum, cum'ere, dis minute. What dat you got under dat box? [17]

from "Down Under":

'Er name's Doreen — well, spare me blessin' days!
You could 'a knocked me down wiv 'arf a brick;

from "Le Grande":

Oui, oui, Monsieur, Vinegaree,
I live there 'alf my life,
The bobbies 'alf she's up there now —

from the vicinity of New Delhi:

When 'Omer wrote 'is blessin' lyre —

from "Bonnie Scotland":

I used to spend a week in Fife —
An' once week it proved to be —

from "Old Girland":

So that's Cleopathera's Needle, betcher,

the use of dialect, even an inaccurate dialect, will be thought to add to the wit of the poem. Similarly, people who speak no language but their own, and that ungrammatically, have been known to howl with laughter at the "broken" English of a foreigner:

Herr Breitmann gife a party,
Dey had biano-playing —.

The tables, however, may be turned and the English translation of a poem may be held up to ridicule. The German language, particularly, lends itself to enjoyable mis-translation in English. The River Glenn (Rhein), The Lorrel's Eye (Die Lorel-ei) and "Thou art like one flower", (Du bist wie eine Blume) are delightful examples.

It is in the province of the wit of words that the writer of non-dramatic verse has the advantage over his stage brother. He has equal opportunities for dialogue and dialect; but, in addition, his plays on words, his double entendres, can appeal to the eye as well as to the ear, and tickle the risibilities through two approaches.

At a slightly higher level than the Wit of Words is the Humour of Situation. Something funny happens. It may be observed a accident or a mistake of nature: a horse eats a straw hat, for example. It may be the result of human carelessness: a man walks into a wall; or of human frailty: a man has too much to drink. It may follow human malice: one clown belts his fellow over the head with a bat; or human treachery: a young wife deceives her old husband. These, like the many other simple farcical themes, can be developed and orchestrated into great symphonies of fun.

The straw-hat-eating horse may produce twin colts both wearing straws hats.[25] The man walks into the wall because his eyes are on a pretty blonde. He upsets the balance of a small boy on the wall who is picking apples from an overhanging tree. The boy saves himself by jumping into the tree, bringing down a branch which pluchs the hat off the pretty girl and with it her lovely golden hair — alas! a wig. Or the inebriated individual may encounter adventures that encompass the devil himself, as a glorious Tom O'Shanter enriches[26] a highly moral narrative with incomparable scorns and pesky comment. Finally, the traditional smutty cuckold story may be expanded into the magnificently executed plot of Chaucer's Miller's Tale.

Closely associated with and usually integrated with the Humorous Situation is the Humorous Background or Picture. In its most elementary form, it is an incongruous detail: a man whose hat is too small;[27] a Pebble who has no toes;[28] rats, who "licked the soup from the cooks' own ladles"[29] (who has seen a rat's tongue?). In its complicated and sophisticated form, it becomes a Goldberg-like con-

tmption of ingenious devices which invites the reader to re-read the verse in order to discover more and more ludicrous details, and to enjoy them accordingly. Or it expands into a grand climactic mêlée, a hullabaloo of excited figures, of confused movements, of noisy uproar. Of such scenes, Chaucer is a past master, as can be seen in his Reeve's Tale, his Merne Freeston Tale, and others.

Humour of situation can, of course, be on higher levels than that of farce. An incident may be narrated which entails almost no physical action, but whose plot, carrying a lively comment on manners and customs, foibles and foibles, is side-splitting in its intellectual restraint. W.S. Gilbert's "Etiquette" is a capital example of this type.[30]

The implication of imperfection in manners and morals leads me to my third classification: Humour of Characters. As with the other two classifications, it can be reduced to its crudest form: laughter at people for defects in their very appearance. This subdivision, perhaps, is interchangeable with or can be catalogued under the humour of Picture. For the most part, however, it is some flaw in the personality or character of the creature (human or animal) ridiculed that provides the amusement. These flaws are the grist for the playwright's mill. The first comedies, it is well known,[31] had their set comic characters, such as the tiresome old man, the braggart, the fawning courtier, etc., and to try to present a play without them would have been like conducting an orchestra in which the strings, woodwinds, brass and percussion

had been omitted. Aristotle could well talk of the laughter occasioned by "failing and deformity"[32]; and the "infirmities of others"[33] mentioned by Hobbes are mental, social, and spiritual as well as physical. Vices and follies have from the beginning of time been held up for ridicule, although (and Mr. Bixby will bear me out)[34] some vices and follies are much funnier than others.

By selecting the dominant characteristic in a person, by distilling it to its essence, and by exaggerating it to a monstrously funny thing, the great comic writers have given us the Comedy of Humours and her gentler sister, the Comedy of Manners.[35] In Ben Jonson's words:

> As when some one peculiar quality
> Doth so possess a man that it doth draw
> All his effects, his spirits, and his powers
> In their confluctions all to run one way --
> This may be truly said to be a humour.[36]

Meredith after Jonson worked on the same principle, expanding it to include the theory that any exaggeration of trait (even of a good one), any departure from the norm, any loss of "equilibre", produced results which could be ridiculed.[37] The lasting quality of his success surely proves the validity of his claim.

Various vices and follies, I have said, are, by their very nature, subject to ridicule. (Why this should be so, I shall not attempt to explain, leaving an explanation to the psychologists, since this is not a psychological treatise.) Even the seven deadly sins can be treated lightly. Avarice is not an attractive quality in an acquaintance, but tight-fistedness is very funny in

verse. We still laugh at Argason, [39] and since his days (wryly indeed) at such verses as,

> I know the market value of each wage-slave professorial,
> And how much loss he'll take for honorarium tutorial. [40]

Gluttony, either in the realm of eating, as with Rudibras, or of drinking, as with Falstaff, can be uproarious. Licentiousness is always good for a laugh, grossly in the barracks, delightedly in private, slyly in the drawing-room, as the Restoration Comedies will bear full witness. Of wrath we sing. [41] Even murder, treated fantastically, as in "Gentle Alice Brown", loses its criminal nature, and becomes a jest.

Attributes may be combined to heighten their effect. Arrogance-docio is amusing enough in a brave man like Cyrano de Bergerac, who said,

> If any Marquis speak again,
> His ribbon shall be fluttered by my cane —
> —
> I challenge all the pit —
> Horace, approach — [42]

In spite of the fact that he was without Protector, his sword his "Protectress". So is cowardice in a bumpkin like Dogberry, whose instructions to the Watch,

> Dogb: — you are to bid any man stand, in the prince's name.
> Watch: How if a' will not stand?
> Dogb: Why, then, take no note of him, but let him go; and presently call the rest of the watch together, and thank God you are rid of a knave. [43]

are evidence of a discretion much greater than valour. But when braggadocio and cowardice are united in one person, as in the miles gloriosus, the Don Adriano de Armado, [44] the mixture of the two diametrically opposed elements more than doubles the laugh value of each.

The attributing of a trait or humour to a person who in real life would be most unlikely to have it is another twist to the humour

of Character. So we are given the Generally Lion,[45] or the highly educated maiden.[46]

In theatrical comedy, Humour of Character is best brought out by Humour of Situation, and can be enhanced by the Wit of Words. In non-dramatic verse, the three types can be kept separate without losing sharpness of effect. Thus, while the delightful formality of Mr. Peter and Mr. Gray[47] is manifested and heightened by their conduct on the desert island, the verse

> — she has a thousand virtues and not one acknowledged sin,
> But she is the sort of person you will liken to a pin,
> And she pricks you and she sticks you, in a way that can't be said —
> Then you seek for what has hurt you, why, you cannot find the head,

sketches a character in four lines that might take an entire scene on the stage.[48] Exposition can be more compact than drama.[49]

Another type of humour, a more subtle type, can be found in all of these, the Humour of Words, of Situation, of Character; yet it rises above them. I shall call it the Humour of Allusion, although the Humour of Erudition might be better nomenclature. By connotation, by allusion, by symbol, by allegory, it gives a glimpse of a world beyond the obvious jesting of the poem; it links the particular to the prevalent, the individual to the universal; it uncovers unlikely but ludicrous comparisons and contrasts; it may carry us into the satirical, the philosophical, the metaphysical; it is caviare to the general but a treat to the epicure. A highly erudite poem like *The Horse Fancyers Tale*[50] can give this delight in a prolonged repast. Here is a delicious morsel:

Sumne is i-cumen in,
  Lewde sing cuccu!
Leddes reole and sliveo lede,
Professour beneth tu —
Sing cuccu!

Scholeur strivath after lyre,
  Sleepeth after shepskin eve;
Writeth theeoth, honours seeketh,
  Merie sing cuccu!

Cuccu, cuccu, well singes thu cuccu;
  Ne flunke thu never nu;
  Sing cuccu, nu, sing cuccu,
Sing cuccu, Pope Boffa Coppe, nu!. 61

which can be fully savoured only by the scholar acquainted with the first known English folk-song, Latin, Old English, the faculty, and the student body.

Weight of learning, of course, can well sink a verse below the level of the amusing. Caviare to the general may become pages of footnotes to the despairing student of bygone humour.

Finally, I have postulated still another type of humour which I should like to call the humour of Philosophy; but, lest I steal my own thunder, I am deferring a discussion of this class until I reach the concluding chapter of my thesis.

FOOTNOTES TO CHAPTER II

1 See Paul Shorey, "Aristophanes" Mimesis of the World's Best Adventures (Poole and Hill, New York), Vol. II.

2 Shakespeare, "Love's Labour's Lost" (1500.) The Works of William Shakespeare. (Wolsteff Edition, Dilke and Dando and Co., London) p. 149 et seq.

3 Shakespeare, "Romeo and Juliet", op. cit. Act III, sc. 1. "Ask for me tomorrow and you shall find me a grave man."

4 Shakespeare, "Hamlet" op. cit. Act. II, sc. ii - "Cannot thou to board me in Denmark?" etc.

5 Dean Swift, "A Gentle Echo on Women," (In the Doric Manner) The Book of Humorous Verse, compiled by Carolyn Wells, (Garden City Publishing Co., New York, 1926) p. 758.

6 Thomas Hood, "Faithless Nellie Gray," op. cit. p. 707.

7 Henry William Hemenway, "Ethnology", The Pocket Book of Humorous Verse, ed. David McCord (Pocket Books Inc., New York, 1940) p. 366.

8 Samuel Butler, Hudibras Aldine Ed. (Geo. Bell & Sons, London) Part I, Canto I, p. 8, l. 15-16.

9 Dean Swift, "To Dr. Sheridan," 1718. Works, Vol. III, p. 239-240. Aldine Edition, (Geo. Bell & Sons, London.)

10 S.T. Coleridge, Biographia Literaria, Vol II, p. 69.

11 Herman Levy, "Thalo," Opium Smoke, (Alfred A. Knopf)

12 J.T. Trowbridge, "Martin Green and his Flying Machine," Wells, op. cit. p. 690.

13 George Thomas Lanigan, "The Ahkond of Swat," Wells, op. cit. p. 710. Edward Lear's poem of the same name also illustrates fun with words.

14 Patrick Barrington, "Take me in your Arms, Miss Honeypenny-Wilson," A Treasury of British Humour, ed. Norris Bishop, (Howard-McCann Inc., New York) p. 730.

15 Austin Dobson, "The Rondeau," Wells, op cit. p. 732.

16 Celest Burgess, "A Gage of Youth," McCord, op.cit. p. 300

17 Harrison Robertson, "Kentucky Philosophy," Wells, op. cit. p. 320.

18 C.J. Dennis, "The Intro," McCord, op cit. p. 65.

19 Wilson MacDonald, "Verse of Viewpoint in New York," McCord, op. cit. p. 128.

20 Rudyard Kipling, "The 'Oont Gunto 'Is Blooain' Lyre," (Barrack-room Ballads,) A Book of Humorous Poems, compiled by George E. Peter, (Scott, Foresman and Co., Chicago, etc.) 1931. p. 200.

21 George Ostrom, "The Annuity," Wells, op. cit. p. 320

22 Corinne O'Leary, "Reflections on Cleopatra's Needle", Wells, op. cit. p. 106.

23 Chas. Godfrey Leland, "Hans Breitmann's Party," Wells, op. cit. p. 655.

24 F.C. Hibbert, Sarah Binks, (Oxford University Press, Toronto, 1947) pages 22-29.

25 Cf. Mary had a little cat,
It ate a ball of yarn,
And when the little kittens came,
They all had sweaters on. (Author unknown)

26 Robert Burns, "Tam O'Shanter," The Poetical Works of Robert Burns. (American Publishers Corporation, New York.)

27 cf. Charles Chaplin, star of the silent films.

28 Edward Lear, "The Pobble Who Has No Toes," A Book of Lear. (Penguin, 1939) p. 179.

29 Robert Browning, "The Pied Pip er of Hamelin," Baker, op. cit. p. 262.

30 W.S. Gilbert, "Etiquette," Bishop, op. cit. p. 104.

31 See, for example, Gilbert Norwood, The History of Greek Comedy. (Methuen and Co., London, 1931.

or G. Cheney, Theatre. (Tudor Publishing Co., New York, 1930.)

32 See Introduction of this thesis, page vii, para 1.

33 See Introduction of this thesis, page vii para 2.

34 See Chapter I, page 1, of this thesis.

35 The difference between the Comedy of Humours and that of Humour is usually acknowledged to be that the Comedy of Humours ridicules Vice, and the Comedy of Humours ridicules Folly.

36 Ben Jonson, Everyman Out of His Humour. King's Library. (de la Mare Press, 1903.)

37 See, for example, Félix Hémon, "Lafontaine et Molière." Oeuvre de Molière. (C. Delagrave, Paris, 1885.)

38 Molière, L'Avare. (Larousse, Paris).

39 Harold A. Larrabee, (after W.S.Gilbert) "The Very Model of a Modern College President", Hebert, op. cit. p. 67.

40 c.f. "When Sammy Lowered the Horn," comic song much sung on the radio, 1950.

41 W.S. Gilbert, "Gentle Alice Brown," Wells, op. cit. p. 699.

42 Edmond Rostand, "Cyrano de Bergerac", An Introduction to Drama, ed. Rahbel and Beaty, (The Macmillan Co., New York) Act I, sc. iv.

43 Shakespeare, "Much Ado About Nothing", op. cit. Act III, sc. iv.

44 Shakespeare, "Love's Labor's Lost," op. cit.

45 Frank L. Baum, The Wizard of Oz.

47 W.S. Gilbert, "Etiquette," Bishop, op. cit. p. 204.

46 A.C. Mortimer Collins, "At Chloe, W.S." Wells, op cit. p. 134.

48 Ella Wheeler Wilcox, "A Pin", Wells, op.cit. p. 152.

49 Mrs. Wilcox, however, adds six more verses to drive home her point.

50 Chaucer, "The Nonne Preestes Tale," (Cambridge Edition, Houghton, Mifflin, Boston)

51 David Ketcham, "Reconsummate," McCord, op. cit. p. 73.

CHAPTER III

Methods of Humour

Following, and closely associated with, the classification of humour in verse will be an examination of humorous methods. This is simply a study of the techniques of comic verse writers, of the devices they employ to evoke laughter. Leigh Hunt's admirable "Illustrative Essay on Wit and Humour"[1] (to name only one of the many works on the subject) lists some fourteen or fifteen methods used by masters of the art, and gives amusing examples.

Yet I have elected to make my own classification, and to invent my own nomenclature. First on the list and most important, perhaps, are what I should like to call the Contradictions of the Conventional: all the things that we find unusual. Practically all of the Wit of Words can be put in this cupboard, but I prefer to deal with it under the pure mechanics of the trade (my seventh classification).

As far as the Humour of Situation is concerned, the horse eating the straw hat, the youth walking into the well, the man getting drunk, and the woman deceiving her husband are all (we hope) doing the unusual. In addition, however, what may be conventional in another country or epoch may be amusing to us because it is so far removed from our standards of behaviour. A Neanderthal man would not be likely to laugh at

When one lives tensely, words are naught, my Dear!
You never felt I loved you till the day
I sighed and heaved a chunk of rock your way;
Nor I, until you clutched my father's spear
And coyly clipped the lobe from off my ear,
Guessed the sweet thought you were too shy to say —
All mute we listened to the larks of May,
Silent, we hushed the laughter of the year.

Later, my Dear, I'll say you spoke enough!
Do you remember how I took you, "west,
And banged your head upon the frozen hill
Until I broke the ice, and by your feet
Held you submerged until your tongue was still?
When one loves tensely, one is sometimes rough. 2

Similarly, most of the humorous pictures are those which contravene convention: our own conventions. A man wearing white shoes with a dinner jacket may appear well-dressed to a bobo, and a Hottentot will not mind if he leaves off shoes altogether; but we laugh. Or it may be perfectly natural for a Bobble to have no toes, 3 but it does not seem right to us. The Chinese pigtail, the bone through the African's nose, the high-buttoned boots of the beginning of the 20th century, all are funny today.

We have become very set and hide-bound in what we expect of personalities: we ridicule those who do not shape up to our moulds. If a richly dressed and dignified old lady utters some picturesque slang or profanity, we find her hilarious. Or we chuckle when we sing:

— I wondered what Grandma would say
Of the clothes the girls are wearing today.
This morning I met her, I'm feeling quite blue,
For Grandma — is wearing them, too. 4

Nor is Ludmilla, the Soviet lass, who

—thinks it a trifle
To pick up a rifle
And blow out the brains of a Hun, 5

our idea of a sweet young thing.

Aristotle's "failings and deformities"[6], Hobbes' "infirmities of others"[7], Kane's "lying or fiction"[8], can all be classed as the unusual. Anything incongruous can be said to be a contradiction of the conventional; and "incongruity," said Professor George Yetter, "a variation from the usual or expected, is generally considered the fundamental source of humour."[9] The incongruity of animals who talk like humans established the great reputation of Aesop, and added to that of Lafontaine and Gay.

An incongruous event will be even funnier if it comes suddenly, because surprise is an element of the ludicrous, and the surprise element intensifies a joke. If we expect one thing and get another -- in fun, as Max Eastman insists[10], -- we are amused. "Humour," he adds, "is playful disappointment." For example, after penning five sturdy couplets on the dignity of labour and the evils of leisure, Robert Herrick adds,

> Labour keeps you fit and pure,
> But gives no leisure every time.[11]

and turns his verse from sententious moralizing into a delightful quip. In a similar manner, W.S. Gilbert writes,

> "-- Smiles that thrill from any distance
> Shed upon me while I sing!
> Please constitute existence,
> Love me, oh, thou fairy thing!"
> Words like these, outpouring madly,
> You'd perpetually hear,
> If I loved you fondly, madly; --
> But I do not, Phoebe, dear.[12]

Incongruity can sometimes be thrown into sharper relief by contrast with its opposite: i.e. by the use of congruence or appropriateness. Chanticleer's high-flown discourse to Pertelote (condition in the back of a fowl) is most amusing in its incongruity; we should laugh indulgently if the references were

slightly inaccurate or slightly inappropriate. (As a matter of fact, we laugh indulgently if we agree with those authorities who claim that Chaucer's references are inaccurate, but we delight the more in their pertness.)[16] Moreover, the fact that the cook's story is told by a priest to whom learning and moralizing are appropriate takes the joke up another step to a higher level of subtle enjoyment.

Another and simpler illustration: In the Phoenix Park Zoo in Dublin, there was a young lioness whose lithe beige body accentuated the beauty of a pair of ears which seemed to have been made of dark brown velvet. With her in the cage were her two whelps, frolicsome beige kittens, both with dear little brown velvet ears. I laughed aloud when I saw them, and so did the other visitors. Yet it was not at the incongruity of the dark brown ears, or we should have laughed at the lioness, who was merely beautiful.[17] It was the very congruence of the incongruent ears on the babies that delighted us. So also, any child who is the "spittin' image" of his parent generally calls forth admiring chuckles. (The degeneration of the term "spirit and image" into something cunning might be a proof that it 1) has been employed a great deal, and 2) applies to something inherently funny; but to follow up that thought would be to leave my own subject to dabble in the psychological or the philological.)

The commonplace, whether or not used to accentuate the incongruous, becomes funny in itself. Sir William again gives us an example, in juxtaposing beside "an ultrapoetical, supersentimental, out-of-the-way young man", his

— commonplace type, with a stick and a pipe,
And a half-bred black-and-tan.

The bonhomie of laughing at the commonplace, however, I think I shall reserve for my discussion of the H umour of Philosophy. (Chapter XII).

Inaccuracy is the title I have given to my next classification. Exaggeration is the first subdivision.

Exaggeration is a very popular device and perhaps the oldest known to northern literature, not only in the wit of Homer, but in the humour of situation and of character as well. The telling of tall tales has a long and (may I say) honourable history. Through chivalric poetry, we become familiar with the practice of "making a gab"; in one delightful geste, Charlemagne turns to his chevaliers in turn,

Et dist l'empereres: "Seiez, sire ——".

and each of the twelve peers tries to outdo his fellows in telling a "whopper" that we cannot but admire with laughter. The gallant and devout Bishop Turpin, for one, promised that on the morrow, if three chargers were sent galloping past him, he would leap over the first two without touching them, and sent himself on the third, all the while juggling with four large apples. (He swore that if he dropped one of the apples, Charlemagne might put out his eyes.)

Reading a book of Rabelais is like looking at grass through strong field-glasses; everything connected with Gargantua is incredibly large. And, although we may believe Mr. Newell when he tells us that Tuscalosse Sea and the stranger "climbed like two rampageous bears," and "fit and fit and fit", yet we think he ex-

aggravation when he relates that at the end of the fight,

> — not a sign of either chap
> Was found at any turn.
>
> Yet in the region where they fit,
> We found to our surprise,
> One pint of buttons, two big knives,
> Some whiskers and four eyes.

Exaggeration in the humour of Character is equally wide-ranged. Physical traits may be magnified, from the sting of the Cannibal Flea, who had

> — a bite that felt as if someone had driven
> A bayonet into me,

to the size of Gargantua's mare, who was so big that four very large ships were required to bring her from Africa; or to Rabelais' vast proportions.

Exaggeration of faults and foibles is the stuff whereof satire is made. Arpagon, of Molière's Avare, was so stingy that he wouldn't even give you good day. Then, too,

> What continued hot keeps fire,
> How hot eyes languish with desire
> —
> China's the passion of her soul,

says John Gay of his heroine. If, as some writers aver, china was indeed a passion in the souls of some 18th century maidens, then Gay may not himself be exaggerating the trait, but he is summarizing very neatly the exaggerated trait.

The converse of exaggeration, understatement, is another powerful factor in humour. ("Nodocle", Stephen Leacock calls it.) When William Cowper, seeing a "serpent long as Count de Grasse's queue", relates with dignity, "On to the hall I went with pace not

alone".[28] he is much funnier than if he had said he ran as fast as he could.

Gravestones, when they make us laugh, usually do so because of some double meaning in their epitaphs, but often they are just as amusing because of their ironic understatement:

A bird, a man, a loaded gun,
No bird, dead man, Thy will be done. [29]

Here is an entire plot in an epitaph. (No pun intended.) "On the twenty-second of June," runs an epitaph attributed to Ben Jonson, "Jonathan Fiddle went out of tune."[30] He did, indeed.

As an example of understatement in the humour of character, Kipling, in telling us that the Sudanese savage is the fiercest, bravest, craftiest, most skilful, and most determined of all fighting-men, says,

He never got a ha'porth's change of 'im. [31]

Irony, the saying of one thing and meaning its exact opposite, is another type of inaccuracy used to tickle the risibilities of the reader.

He was a gentil harlote and a kynde;
A bettre felawe shold a man not fynde. [32]

said that master of the art, Chaucer, when referring to his loathsome Summoner.

In "The Rape of the Lock", Sir Plume, with imbecile incoherence, remonstrates with the Poet for his theft; and

"It grieves me much," replied the Poet again,
"Who speaks so well should ever speak in vain." [33]

This nasty reply we find very witty. The 18th. century entirists all

made capital use of irony: "The Beasts' Confession",[33] although it is a frank repetition of Lafontaine's fable,[35] seems to add an additional ironic flavour which it did not have before Swift touched it.

The twisted tongue has a worthy representative today in Sir A.P. Herbert,[34] whose "Come to Britain" is a masterly piece of extended irony.

As incongruity is sharpened by an occasional congruence, so the ludicrous effect of exaggeration can be heightened by the addition of one accurate (or statistical) detail. Rowell is much funnier when he says, "two pint of buttons" than if he had said "A heap of buttons"[19]; Gargantua's nurse again provides us with an example, for she was exactly as large as six elephants; her tail, large and square as the tower of St.-Flora (four metres wide by twenty metres high), with one swish created the plain of Beauce from what had been a forest 25 leagues long and 17 leagues wide.[38] (Other Rabelaisian statistics are considered funnier, but their wilderness makes them less mentionable.)

Comic Imitation, the third general method of arousing a laugh, may also have three subdivisions: 1) the mock-heroic, 2) burlesque, and 3) parody.

To take an insignificant subject and, with high-flown language, aggrandizement of character, and much exaltation of mood, give it the appearance of something noble: this is the mock-heroic. Drayton threw himself enthusiastically into the genre in his Nymphidia, especially when recounting the nymph's duel. Pope, too, furnishes us with a

delightful example in "The Rape of the Lock". In true epic style, he tells of the snipping of the lock:

> The meeting points the sacred hair dissever
> From the fair head forever and forever!,

dilates upon the horror of the victim:

> Then flashed the living lightning from her eyes,
> And screams of horror rend the affrighted skies,

and allows us to share the victor's boasting paean of triumph:

> Let wreaths of triumph now my temples twine: 37

A modern mock-epic is found in A.C. Benson's "Initiation".

> Calm and implacable,
> Lying disdainfully the world beneath,
> Sat Humpty-Dumpty on his rural eminence. 38

Mr. Benson has adapted the old expressions, inversions, and other conventions to modern speech, although (of course) he has not carried his machinery to the lengths that Pope did.

In conscious distinction to the mock-heroic, burlesque is the belittling of a grandiose theme (or, as Leigh Hunt says, "farcically degrading" it) with bombastic language, ludicrous incidents, and caustic or jesting comment; in general, a ridiculous of absurdity. Buchanan is undoubtedly the best example in English poetry. Charles Stuart Calverley has given us:

> —Then God's own heather we conned together,
> I and my Willie, (O love my love);
> I need hardly remark it was glorious weather,
> And flitter-bats wavered above, above.
>
> O, if billows and pillows and hours and flowers,
> And all the brave rhymes of an older day,
> Could be fused together this genial weather,
> And carted or carried on wafts away,
> Nor ever again be trotted out — oh no!
> How much fewer volumes of verse there'd be. 41

while an unknown has undertaken to re-tell the story of Young

Lochinvar:

> —— save for his broadsword
> He weapon had none, except a six-shooter
> Or two, a pair of brass knuckles, and an Arkansaw
>
> Toothpick in his boot, so, comparatively speaking,
> He rode all unarmed —— [43]

Parody differs from the other two forms in that it is merely the re-writing of an already existing poem in a playful manner, with different subject matter. As I should like to write more fully about Parody in Chapter XI, I shall here simply mention a few examples.

In the van of the parodists is Ben Jonson, when he imitates [45] "Shall I wasting in despair?" with his

> If she be not so to me
> What care I how black she be? [44]

a poem which shows us always his fineness of mind and purity of [46] poetry. Louis Untermeyer's "Robert Frost: Death of the First Man" excites our admiration; while even Lord Tennyson (one might hope) would have to laugh at "The Village Choir."

> There not to reason why
> The psalm was pitched too high,
> There but to gasp and cry
> Out the Old Hundred
> ——
> Stormed they with shout and yell,
> Not wise they sang nor well,
> Drowning the sexton's bell
> While the church wondered. [46]

The device of cross-purposes has served comedy nobly, particularly on the stage and now on the radio. Mistaken identity, the [47] theme on which the plots of the "Menaechmi" and "The Comedy of [48] Errors" are based, is a well into which pitchers have been let

down countless times; but, far from running dry, it seems to bubble up with new mirth at each dipping. Misapprehensions arising from misunderstanding a remark or speech, or from missing the beginning of a conversation, give us many happy moments.

My fifth classification is the Topical Joke. On the stage, no matter how funny a remark or incident or personage may be, if it or he be given a local application, it will be just that much funnier to most audiences. This application itself need not be clever or amusing at all. One comedian may comment on his foil's appearance without raising much of a laugh, but if he adds, "You look like Mayor Brown of this town", there will be a shout of appreciation.

The element of humour in the topical joke is partly surprise, partly spontaneousness, partly comradeliness, and partly that flattery of finding out a man's name and using it in conversation. Whether used on the stage or in humorous poetry, the topical joke may be amiable; but it may also be bitter invective, drawing its applause from the fact that the audience or reader hates the same thing that the writer does. It is, alas! (or perhaps, Thank Heaven!) for the most part, a transient thing; blow the wind and it is gone. And the verse which contains it goes with the topic, unless it applies to a mighty event, or unless the lines depend for their effect on more than topicality. "Absalom and Achitophel"[40] will live on as long as Charles II and Monmouth are historic figures. "The Rhyme of Sant"[50] still delights us with its ingenuity.[51]

It might be argued that all humorous verse is nonsense, but Nonsense Verse, such as Edward Lear, Lewis Carroll, and others, have

written, is an entire category by itself. This, however, I should like to defer to a later chapter (see Chapter XI). There remains only my seventh or last classification, which I have called the Mechanics of Humour. Under this head would go all the wit of words mentioned in Chapter II: the plays on words, the puns, dialect, mis-translations, meaning signs, and rhyme schemes.

Also included are transpositions of words in a sentence; humorous figures of speech: similes such as "a face like a blister",[55] and metaphors such as "And his passion boiled and bubbled";[56] personification of animals such as "The Owl and the Pussy-cat went to Sea", or of things such as "My bed will fold up where I fold, And arch its back, if all be told."[57] In fact, all the figures of speech are tools to the humourist's trade, singly or in combination. A clever use of metaphor and personification intermingled can be found in Aristophanes' chorus of the women:

> They're always abusing the women
> As a terrible plague to the men;
> ———
> You all keep fuming and fretting —
> "Where is my Plague today?"
> If a Plague looks out of the window,
> Up go the eyes of the men,
> If she hides, then they all keep staring,
> Until she looks out again.[58]

Macaronic humour, in which words or tags from other languages are used with comic effects, has had its vogue:

> How dulce to vivo occult from mortal eyes,
> Down on the bowb with mode to conservice,
> Carp the suave berries from the crescent vine,
> And bibe the flow from longicaudate kine!.[59]

James C.H. Bolton.

Mrs. Malaprop has given her name to another brand of mechanical

humour which has proved delightful in verse. This is a distortion of a word or the confusing of it with one which has a similar sound; and is originally committed quite unintentionally and unconsciously, as when Mrs. Malaprop asks Lydia to "illiterate him quite from your memory."[58] Children provide the humourists with numerous examples, especially in their misinterpretations of hymns, e.g. "O, wash up the King, all glorious above."[59] The Irishman's circumlocution or self-contradicting statements (what Stephen Leacock calls "Irish bulls")[60] are akin to malaprapisms.

Then, too, repetitions have proved invaluable to the humourists. Little catch phrases or meaningless syllables add a lilting gaiety to a verse, "with a hey, nonny, nonny"; but ordinary words or remarks may be repeated almost endlessly for ridiculous effect. Holière is famous for his "Heure home", "Sens dot", "Morbleu"[61][62][63]. And in prose, Bruce Marshall's use of repetition in the dialogue of the Yellow Fort's mother[64] provides not only character drawing and comic relief, but also gives his prose a sort of rhythm and converts it into something not unlike verse.

Finally, paradox has proved itself a sharp tool of the trade.

> The Peer now spreads the glittering forfex wide
> To enclose the lock; now joins it to divide,[65]

says Pope wittily. Paradoxes are, however, for the most part, witty rather than funny, and it is the laughable that I am seeking.

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CHAPTER IV

THE TRADITIONAL BUTTS OF HUMOR

What or whom do we laugh at?

I have said that we laugh at words, situations, pictures, characters, allusions. I have said that we are made to laugh by contradictions of the conventional, by inversion, by imitation, and by other comic devices. I find that still another classification is necessary to the foundation on which I hope to build the structure of my study of humanity in humorous poetry.

According to Professor Greig,[1] we laugh at what pleases us; we must agree with him, because we find that we laugh at such things as love,[2] sex, adventure, even twin whelps that look like their mother.[3] According to Aristotle,[4] we laugh at the ugly or the distorted; we have also found this to be true — clowns are not pretty, Falstaff was ill-proportioned. According to Max Eastman,[5] we laugh at what is unplacement; and this, again, we must admit, since we have to conform to laughing at follies, vices, pain, misfortune, etc.[6] Can we say that we laugh at everything? Hardly, or if we do, we must say that we laugh at some things more than at others.

Yet, throughout the ages, some laughing-stocks have become traditional. There are some things — words, situations, pictures, characters — so inherently or historically, so universally, so ridiculously funny that they have amused the audiences of Aristophanes and the readers of the New Yorker in equal measure. In type they have remained static, although their treatment has varied with the century, the society, and the country in which they have appeared.

Other targets for mirth, once popular, have changed completely or disappeared altogether. How both the constant and varying butts for ridicule have been treated will be dealt with more minutely in the chapters on the different epochs; here I should like only to sketch out a blue print of this aspect of my subject.

It may be said that the humorous poet finds his text from (and makes us laugh at) Ideas, Institutions, People. This may be a highly artificial distinction; to uphold it rigidly would be impossible, since most frequently the idea on which institutions are based are ridiculed through the people who maintain those institutions; yet I offer it because I shall find it useful in developing my theme.

Since ideas are in constant flux, it has been impossible for me to find any one single idea which has been laughed at incessantly for centuries. A new idea, an outmoded idea, a reasonable idea exaggerated beyond reason, an idea which does not coincide with our own, can be reduced to absurdity, perhaps even laughed out of existence. Romantic adventures long held the medieval mind in thrall. Chaucer in his Sir Thopas slyly tilted at the extravagances of the metrical romances; but it was Cervantes who finally dealt them the death-blow when Don Quixote charged bushes and windmills. Précieuité could not survive Molière's ridicules. No laugh in the world has yet been strong enough to blow away the idea of glory in victory (at least not to the extent of making people stop waging war), but when Southey entertains us with "The Battle of Blenheim," he is not mocking little Wilhelmine, young Peterkin, or even old Casper. He

in directing bitter derision at the idea of victory.

Of institutions held up to the light of scornful mirth, the Church, the Government, and Marriage are the most conspicuous. Throughout Hudibras, Butler castigates Presbyterianism ("the true church militant") directly,

> Synods are mystical bear-gardens (Part I, Canto 3, l.1000)
>
> Synods are whelps o'the Inquisition do do lines 1145-6)
> A mongrel breed of like perdition,

and also, obliquely, through Presbyterians,

> Such as do build their faith upon
> The holy text of pike and gun (Part I, Canto 1, lines 125-6)

who

> Compound for sins they are inclin'd to
> By damning those they have no mind to. (I.1. lines 215-6.)

And Robert Southey has harsh things to say of various sects. William Blake, without renouncing his faith, prefers a more comfortable opportunity to worship God than the church offers. Thomas Hardy's bitter poems against the church can hardly be called funny, although one might say that they were filled with humour or humours.

The governing body, if it irks us, can make us derisive; if it irks others, can make us merry. Mockery is a sort of compensation; as a schoolboy makes fun of school, so we cavil at anything that keeps us in check, even when we acknowledge it to be necessary and/or desirable. No one could question the government-upholding virtues of Chesterton, yet he wrote

> And they that rule in England,
> In stately conclave met,
> Alas, alas, for England,
> They have no graves as yet.

On the other hand, if the party in power is not of our choosing, (although it is no longer true that

> — every boy and every gal
> That's born into the world alive
> Is either a little Liberal
> Or a little Conserve-tive,) [13]

we attack it all the more lustily, using our verses as weapons, and honouring our efforts with the name of satire, whose objective is the amendment of harmful conditions. And as weapons, political ballads have been demonstratingly effective. Who dares forget Lillibullero? [14]

While Governments have been shaken and even uprooted by convulsions of laughter, the holy estate of matrimony has never trembled under the gusts of mirth that have edified around it. In fact, it has stood fast under calumny, mockery, direct attack. Men continue to marry, and today as in early ages, continue to find matrimony extremely, or invitingly, amusing. A man may write contemptuously,

> How happy a thing were a wedding
> And a bedding,
> If a man might purchase a wife
> For a twelvemonth and a day;
> But to live with her all a man's life,
> Forever and aye,
> Till she grow as grey as a cat.
> Good faith, Mr. Parson, excuse me from that! [15]

and a woman laconically reply,

> At breakfast a husband is cheery or blue,
> At dinner, he's blue or he's cheery,
> And when you've admitted these facts to be true,
> You've mastered the whole subject, dearie. [16]

Skeyth's verse, however, is aimed more at the husband as a person, than at "the whole subject" of matrimony as an institution. As

indeed, most of the reviling poems are directed toward persons.

In the consideration of traditional butts among people, the saying that we laugh at Men, Women, and the Clergy, may be witty and inclusive; but it is not enlightening. Nor will it be adequate merely to list the comic types of the old comedies.[17]

The clergy can be dismissed with the fewest words. The hypocrite who is a contradiction of his cloth; the glutton, the wine-bibber, or the lecher who is a contradiction of his vows; the economical[18] who has used his freak for his own ends; these men, headed by Tartuffe, arousing contempt or hatred, have been mocked. From the Bishop on his throne to the begging friar in the dust of the road, none has been immune. Chaucer's Monk, "a manly man, to be an abbot able," earned not "a pulled hen" for taste or vows or asceticism or holiness.[19] His Friar, a "wantowne and a merye," was equally despicable. Spenser gives us a parish priest, ignorant, lazy, irresponsible, and worldly, who said,

> It is enough to doo our small devotion
> And then to follow any merrie motion.[20]

Browning, a cunning Pope.[21] And all members of all orders have been ridiculed, not only for contradictions of their creeds, but also for adherence to them.[22]

Of the laymen, those in high places receive the brunt of the first attack. Since the very dawn of comedy, born as it was in the brief periods of freedom of speech,[23] the primary target for witticisms has been the rulers. Invective has been used to discredit a hated oppressor; satire to demonstrate the evils of tyranny. Didactic poetry has taught that worldly pomp does not always bring dignity and happiness;

and the high in estate -- the governor, the baron, the rich man, the "boss" -- have always been a fruitful source of the purely entertaining joke. Aristophanes had a delightful time jabbing at Cleon,[24] in passages that make us wonder how he managed to retain his life and liberty. Even gentle Spenser caused a chuckle at great Elizabeth, when, by depicting an overfed lion doffing his skin to sleep in cool comfort, he suggested that the queen was napping.[25]

> Ye see yon birkie, ca'ed a lord,
> Wha struts and shaves and a' that,
> Though hundreds worship at his word,
> He's but a coof for a' that.[26]

or Burns, and Southey is just as contemptuous of the great Napoleon.[27] Sheer hatred gloams out of F.R. Scott's verse on the capitalists:

> This is their
> Test
> Of what is
> Best,
>
> Whatever
> Fills
> Their vaults and
> Tills.[28]

Conversely (and it is curious that most targets have a reverse side which also possesses a magnetic attraction for the shafts of wit) those of low estate, too, have played their part in the making of humorous poetry. Whole generations of rascally slaves or servants, Xanthiuses,[29] Dromios,[30] or flirtatious maids; regiments of "other ranks", soldiers like Sgt. Chunkie's typist,[31] or sailors like "Little Billee";[32] crowds of tramps and beggars, Autolycus[33] and his ilk; all sorts of little men have fed our hunger for mirth. With the rise of the middle class, the bourgeois became the laughing-stock

of the aristocracy because of the depths out of which he had risen, and of the people because of the heights to which he aspired.[34]

The old man, descendant of the Greek tutor, is another favourite among funny people. Garrulousness, silliness, and cupidity, are attributed to him, and he lives in the Cimmerian,[35] and the Father Williams.[36] Yet he, too, has his opposite number, for the callow youth does not escape jibes in school or out.[37] That all the world loves a lover is questionable; it seems much more certain that all the world is willing to laugh at one.[38] If he is unsuccessful in his suit, and therefore, one would say, an object of commiseration, he is even funnier. His fun-value, too, is doubled if he is over-old, over-young, ugly, crippled, or mentally deficient. The cuckold can always be resorted to when other comic devices fail.

Practicallyevery trade or profession has been ridiculed through its representatives. Of medicine, John Gay said,

> Men may escape from rope and gun,
> Nay, some have outlived the doctor's pill,[39]

and Joseph Jekyll,

> See, one physician, like a swaller pikes,
> The patient lingers and by inches dies.
> But two physicians, like a pair of oars,
> Waft him more swiftly to the Stygian shores.[40]

Chaucer's Man of Lawe, who "yet semed busier than he was," heads a huge company of legal gentlemen of literature renowned for their astuteness if not for their honesty. The bragging captain (the bragadocio of the Italian comedy), too, is followed by ranks of amusing military men, including such gallants as Sir William's

heavy dragoon,[41] and the redoubtable Captain Jinks of the Horse Marines.[42]

Critics came under fire, none so devastating as Pope's, e.g.

> Some have at first for wits, then poets passed,
> Turned critics next, and proved plain fools at last.
> Some neither can for neither wits nor critics pass,
> As heavy mules are neither horse nor ass.[43]

The chemist has drawn a gentle raillery:

> I am Potassium to thine Oxygen,[44]

while the audience roars with the policeman, whose

> —— life is not an 'appy one.[45]

Of them all, there is not much doubt that doctors, lawyers, and soldiers have appeared the oftenest in joking stanzas.

The very learned man, young or old, quack or genuine, the erudite scholar (the doctors of the Italian comedy, Jonson's Alchemist[46]) and his antithesis, the fool, whether completely imbecile or merely a gull (or the "so stupid Mortimer Stanz"[47]); the eyesplint and the bumpkin; the foreigner, be he Frenchman, Jew, Irishman: these, too, have played their parts in our comedies, either dramatic or poetic.

It may be said that, with the exception of the professional man, all these masculine butts are so by virtue of being extremes, or departures from the norm; that in listing the high and the low, the old and the young, the disappointed lover and the cuckold, the learned man and the fool, the eyesplint and the bumpkin, and finally the foreigner,[48] I am only elaborating what I have said about humor of Characters.[49] This accusation may be just, although I am discriminating rather than elaborating. I have postulated that the extravagant and the unusual in character may be made to appear ludicrous; here I am adding that

the use of the comic element, whether an exaggerated or an unusual trait, has been particularly popular and successful in these ten or twelve cases.

When I go on to deal with women as butts, however, the criticism that I am merely elaborating or even discriminating cannot apply. For Woman, not the woman with the fault or the vice, not the woman with the peculiar appearance, Woman herself, has provided material in abundance for the humorists of all the centuries. The very sex is ridiculous. One would think that God had created the female as a colossal joke; that Eve, having been extracted from Adam's ribs, had been tickling them ever since.

Perhaps men laugh at women because, as Professor Craig would say, they love them; Aristophanes' clever Chorus of Women, or Burns'

> Her prentice han' she tried on man,
> An' then she made the lasses, O,

would be affirmation. Perhaps it is because, following Aristotle's thought, they find women an ugly or distorted caricature of men; indeed Rabelais might have thought so when he had Dr. Rondibilis say,

> When I speak of women, I speak of a sex so frail, so variable, so inconstant, and so imperfect that Nature impresses me, — and I say it with all honour and reverence, — as having lost, when she was building Woman, that good sense with which she has created, and formed all other things. I have thought it all over, one-hundred-and-five times, and I am sure I do not know what conclusion to come to, unless it be that in turning out Woman, Nature had more in mind the social delectation of Man and the perpetuation of the species than she did the perfecting of individual womankind.

Or perhaps it is because (as Max Eastman's argument) they find them disagreeable.

> Every woman is at heart a rake
> —
> And yet, believe me, good as well as ill,
> Woman's at best a contradiction still.

are two of the characteristics Pope finds in the sex; while sentimental Shenstone remembered his worthy schoolmistress as the "melancholious dame" who wielded

> Her birchen empire; with caution fear entwined,
> With dark distrust, and sad repentance filled;
> And stedfast hate, and sharp affliction joined,
> And fury uncontroll'd, and chastisement unkind. 54

Whatever the reason, masculine poets laugh at women.

It would seem as if the most frequently funny (because the most disagreeable?) of all women are wives. A wedding-day may be a blissful one, but cannot compare in rapture (if one is to believe the exultant verse of the new widowers) with the funeral-day of the bride.

> Here lies my wife: here let her lie!
> Now's at rest -- and so am I, 55

the malicious epitaph on his wife, is a reminder that Dryden also wrote, "Marriage is to Hate."

> Here lies my wife,
> Here lies she;
> Hallelujah!
> Hallelujah! 56

is the sentiment of some non-literary Dryden.

How a wife can plague her husband brings us back to Chaucer and the Wife of Bath; deceiving wives gave the appreciative poet excellent plots, such as his Miller's, Merchant's, and Shipman's Tales. Deceived wives, however, can be just as funny; that is 57
proved by the irate wife of Menaechmus (Menaechmi) who, although she remains nameless, was certainly not without a voice. Then there was Tom's Kate, unable to keep her men from straying.

Gathering her brows like gathering storm,
Nursing her wrath to keep it warm. [58]

Shrewish wives, like Sir Richard's Rebecca, have caused their good men to lend and lives; others have neglected their spouses sadly.[59][60] Wives have talked their husbands into frenzy, or have troubled them equally by remaining silent.[61]

In fact, a wife makes such a good target for jests that even the most uxorious husband will refer to his spouse as his "ball and chain", and agree with Charles Cotton that

— be she good or be she evil,
Be she saint or be she devil —
Yet whoever in his life
Has is married to a wife. [62]

However laughable wives may be, though, old maids are even more so, although perhaps less often in poetry. From Benjamin Franklin's noisy antiquated maid,[63] past Oliver Wendell Holmes' dear unmarried aunt,[64] down to F.R. Scott's "virgins of sixty who still write of passion",[65] has flowed a stream of mischievous verse about vinegary virgins or unchaste, wrinkling spinsters.

The woman of fashion, angling as she does for attention, catches at the same time, a great deal of raillery. Where would the Restoration dramatists be without her? Even the balladists jibed.[66] Swift's unmerciful lines have outlived powder and patches, furbelows and "tête";[67][68] Miss Mulliney's sad plight touches funny bones but no hearts.[69]

Ugly women are funny.[70] Beautiful women (young fools vain) are funny;[71] the unlettered woman evokes a chuckle,[72] the blue-stocking has occasioned mirth both good- and ill-natured;[73] good women can be mocked,[74] so can bad ones.[75]

The only summary that can be made is that women are wonderful laughing-stocks.

Of recent years, within the last two or three centuries, that is, there has also come a realization that children can be funny. Originally, the use of children in humorous verse was rather sentimental; it was a genre of bright sayings.[76] Later, more realism has been used, and a mock-boting tone has crept in.[77]

Animals, who have figured as comedians for some four thousand years of verse,[78] are another kind of laughing-stock which has changed in part through the ages. The early fabulists, such as Aesop, Phaedrus, and Babrius, wanted beasts merely to designate various types of men; and this tradition continued through the mediaeval cycles. Chaucer may have been the first to make an artistic blend of human and animal characteristics,[79] but it took another couple of hundred years before the possibilities of the animals as such were fully exploited by Lafontaine.[80] Modern versifiers have further divorced the beasts from their human counterparts, and have still found something risible in the remainder.[81] The difference in treatment, however, will be deferred to later chapters of this thesis.

NOTATIONS TO CHAPTER IV

1 J.C.C. Greig, M.A. The Psychology of Laughter and Comedy. (Geo. Allen & Unwin, Co., London, 1923). See also Introduction, pages vii and viii of this thesis.

2 See Chapter III, page 38, of this thesis.

3 See Introduction, page vii, of this thesis.

4 Max Eastman, The Enjoyment of Laughter. (Hamish Hamilton, London, 1937), p. 25. See also Introduction, page viii, of this thesis.

5 Miguel di Cervantes, Don Quixote. (Dutton, New York, 1930.)

6 Moliere, Les Précieuses Ridicules.(Larousse, Paris)

7 Robert Southey, "The Battle of Blenheim," The Book of Humorous Verse, compiled by Carolyn Wells, (Garden City, New York) p. 252

8 Samuel Butler, Hudibras, Aldine Edition, (Geo. Bell & Sons, London)

9 Robert Southey, "The Devil's Walk on North," Wells, op. cit. Stanzas, 18-19, also 15 et. seq., p. 250.

10 William Blake, "The Little Vagabond," Wells, op. cit. p. 260.

11 e.g. Thos. Hardy,"The Church-Builder," Wessex and Other Poems, (Harper Bros., London) p. 245.

12 G.K. Chesterton, "Elegy in a Country Churchyard," The Pocket Book of Humorous Verse, ed. Hebert, (Pocket Books, N.Y., 1940) p. 258

13 W.S. Gilbert, Iolanthe, (Chappell, London) Act II, "Willie's Song."

14 See Footnote 20, Chapter I, page 11, of this thesis.

15 Thomas Fletcher, "On Marriage," McCord, op. cit. p. 336.

16 Sterne, "Sentimental Journey," McCord, op. cit. p. 332.

17 See Footnote 31, Chapter II, page 23, of this thesis.

18 Molière, Le Tartuffe. (Larousse, Paris)

19 Chaucer, "Prologue to the Canterbury Tales," Cambridge Edition, (Houghton, Mifflin Co., Boston) l. 167 and l. 200.

20 Edmund Spenser, "Mother Hubberd's Tale," Spenser's Minor Poems, Ed. Selincourt,
lines 457-8

21 Robert Browning, "The Pope and the Net," Wells, op. cit. p. 330.

22 W.H. Auden, "For the Last Time," Poems, (Random House, New York) p. 56.

> In gorgeous robes befitting the occasion
> For weeks their spiritual and temporal lordships met
> To reconcile eternity with time ---

In thinly veiled language, Montesquieu called the Pope an "old fool". (Lettres Persanes, XXIX).

23 See, e.g., Nabbel and Beaty, An Introduction to Drama, (Macmillan Co., New York) p. 28-9.

24 Cleon did bring Aristophanes, or his producer Callistratus, into court because of what was said in the "Babylonians", of which only fragments now remain. In "The Knaps," the principal character is called Khelucleon, or Hate-Cleon, while the silly old father is called Philocleon, or Love-Cleon.

35 Edmund Spenser, "Mother Hubberd's Tale," op. cit. Part IV.

36 Robert Burns, "Is There for Honest Poverty?" Works, (American Publishers Corporation)

37 Robert Southey, "The March to Moscow," Wells, op. cit. p. 775.

38 F.R. Scott, "The Barons," Overture, (Ryerson, Toronto.)

39 Aristophanes, "The Frogs."(Modern Library)

40 Ben Jonson, "Volpone" An Introduction to Drama, op. cit.

41 Sgt. R. Cherwick, "Situation Normal," McCord, op. cit. p. 69.

42 W.M. Thackeray, "Little Billee," Wells, op. cit. p. 567.

43 Shakespeare, A Winter's Tale.

44 Cf., e.g. the remarks of the Comte Dorante and the Marquise Dorimène, with those of Nicole, the pretty servant, in Molière, Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme. (Larousse, Paris).

45 Beaumont and Fletcher, The Maid's Tragedy, (Bell and Daldy, London.)

46 Lewis Carroll, Alice in Wonderland, (Modern Library.)

47 e.g. William Palmer, "The Speech in School," A Book of Humorous Poems, ed. C.H.Toter, (Scott, Foresman & Co., Chicago, etc.) p. 52.

48 e.g. William E. Aytoun, "The Lay of the Lover's Friend," Wells, op. cit. p. 69.

49 John Gay, — McCord, op. cit. p. 276.

50 Joseph Jekyll, "Two Heads are better than One," McCord, op. cit. p. 2 70.

51 W.S. Gilbert, Patience,(Chappell & Co., London) The Colonel's Song.

52 Captain Jinks, Popular song, arr. Chas. E. Pratt.

53 A. Pope, "Essay on Criticism," Works, (American Publishers Corporation) lines 33-39.

44 —"The Chemist to his Love," Wells, op. cit. p. 300.

45 W.S. Gilbert, The Mikado of Nonsense. (Chappell & Co., London)

46 Ben Jonson, The Alchemist, (Modern Library).

47 From the days of Aesop's fox and ape or ass, the astute person has victimized the silly and credulous. Cf. Part IV, Spenser, "Mother Hubberd's Tale," op. cit.

48 Ventriloquist's dummy on the Edgar Bergen radio show.

49 See Chapter II, page 16 et seq. of this thesis.

50 Aristophanes, Thesmophoriazusae, tr. Collins, (Macmillan, 1900)

51 Robert Burns, "Green Grow the Rashes," op. cit.

52 F. Rabelais, Gargantua, (Lemuese, Paris) Bk. III, Ch. xxxii. (Putnam translation)

53 A.Pope, "Moral Essays", Works, op. cit. Epistle II, 1.216; lines 269-70.

54 William Shenstone, "The Schoolmistress," 18th Century Poetry and Prose, ed. Bredvold, etc., (The Ronald Press, N.Y.) lines 91-4

55 John Dryden, "Epitaph on his Wife," Ward, op. cit. p. 300

56 Epitaph at Leeds, Ward, op. cit. p. 300

57 Plautus,"Menaechmi," An Introduction to Drama, op. cit. p. 88

58 R. Burns, "Tam O'Shanter," Works, op. cit. lines 11-12.

59 The Ballad of St. Michael's Fenny, Old Glee.

60 E.g. A.H. Rose, "Husband and Heathen," Wells, op. cit. p. 100
—"A Cosmopolitan Woman," Wells, op. cit. p. 107.

61 E.g. Rabelais' story of the man who married the dumb wife, (Pantagruel, Bk. XII, ch. xxxiv) and its variants. Cf. also Ben Jonson, The Silent Woman. Although both these works are in prose, they are striking examples.

62 Charles Cotton, "The Joys of Matrimony," Wells, op. cit. p. 344.

63 Benjamin Franklin, "Epitaph on a Talkative Old Maid," McCord, op. cit. p. 351

64 O.W. Holmes, "My Aunt," Tutor, op. cit. p. 101.

65 F.R. Scott, "The Canadian Authors' Meet," op. cit.

66 See The Kenyon Reviews, ed. Hyder Rollins, (Harvard University Press), Vol. VI, Nos. 47 and 50.

67 J. Swift, "A Beautiful Young Nymph Going to Bed, Written for the Honour of the Fair Sex," Poems, Aldine Edition, (Bell & Sons, London)

68 The enormous, elaborate headdress of ladies of the 18th century.

69 W.A. Butler, "Nothing to Wear," Wells, op. cit. p. 168.

70 E.E. C.M. Cayvl, "How a Girl Was Careless of her Grammar," Wells, op. cit. p. 300.

71 E.E. A. Pope, "Moral Essays," op. cit. Epistle II.
J.G. Saxe, "The Coquette," Tutor, op. cit. p. 80.

72 C.C. Colton, "Feminine Arithmetic," Wells, op. cit. p. 101

73 Cf. Mortimer Collins, "At Chloe, M.A." and "Chloe, M.A." Wells, op. cit. pages 104 & 105.

A. Pope, "Moral Essays," Poems, op. cit. Epistle II, lines 83-4.

74 Cf. Robert Herrick, "No Fault in Women," Wells, op. cit. p. 106

75 Cf. Thos. Hardy, "The Ruined Maid," op. cit.

76 E.E. F. Locker-Lampson, "A Terrible Infant," McCord, op. cit. p. 61.

77 A.M. Bowman, "Away with Bloodshed," McCord, op. cit. p. 50

78 Aesop lived in the seventh century before Christ. According to E.H. Foss (Aesop article, Library of the World's Best Literature) there were Chinese, Hindu, Egyptian, and other animal stories in existence centuries before Aesop's birth.

79 E.g. Chenier, "The Rome Prevented Vole," op. cit.

80 Cf. Gustav Lanson, Histoire de la Littérature Française. (Hachette et Cie, Paris.) p. 860.

81 E.g. C.K. Ogden, "Constructive Reading," Volio, op. cit. p. 869.

CHAPTER V

KIND AND UNKIND POETRY

On the basis of all these classifications and categories, then, is it possible to formulate some opinion of what is kind and what is unkind in humorous poetry? If a verse is not directly cruel, is it humane?

Roughly speaking, one could say that it is unkind:

To inflict pain, sorrow, discomfort, or embarrassment;

To find something funny in pain, sorrow, discomfort, or embarrassment, however inflicted.

To laugh at another person because of a sense of one's own superiority; in other words, because of that person's bodily defects, mental inadequacies, or moral failures.

To belittle another person, or to make him out as worse than he is;

To cry down mankind.

On first glance, it might appear that every piece of humorous poetry errs in one or another of these particulars. I shall try to examine some verse that has not fallen into such error.

One is inclined to say that kind poetry is that which engenders a feeling of sympathy, of kindliness, even of admiration for the victim of the joke; whereas cruel poetry is that which delights in finding all possible flaws in human beings, which paints people in colours blacker than nature's. But it is unsafe to make broad, sweeping statements.

there are usually mitigating circumstances.

Let us begin with the writer's purpose. (cf. Chapter I, of this thesis.) In invective, cruelty will be thought and as well as the sense of the sense; in addition to discrediting his adversary, the poet will want to make him squirm; hence the more brutal his work is, the more effective it will be. Satire, however, will justify its bites and hurs by its noble purpose of amendment; and its lack of inhumanity, if not its humanity, will be in direct ratio to its adherence to improvement. A surgeon inflicts fiendish torture when he amputates a gangrenous leg — prior to the 19th century, he would generally operate without anaesthesia — but he cannot be accused of fiendish cruelty.

Similarly, didactic verse has an excuse for its harshness. No feelings can be hurt because some one has sung the multiplication tables or rhymed other instructions; but moral verses usually employ horrible examples grievously applicable to the person at whom they are aimed: Matilda, for one, who was playing burning doors.[1] To be sure, methods of pedagogy prevailing before the 20th century were often harsh to the point of savagery. The rod enforced a great many lessons. Indeed, in the 18th century, it was customary on any great occasion to whip little children to impress the event on their memories.[2] Yet, in spite of exaggeration, or of frightening pictures of sadistic teachers such as those painted by James Joyce,[3] pedagogical unkindness generally has an altruistic motive. Pitiless verse may be unkind, too.

If the writer's object is solely that of entertainment, it will

be axiomatic that cruelty will serve him no useful purpose if his readers do not find cruelty amusing. His enjoyment will vary with that of his public (the box-office, so to speak) which will reflect the age, the society, and the circumstances in which he lives. It will therefore be in poetry that is written frankly to please that I shall probably find my greatest contrasts in the humanity of various epochs.

Assuming next the types of humour in verse (cf. Chapter II), I consider that a comic spirit which derives its value purely from the wit of words cannot be unkind. It is wholly an intellectual thing. We do not really laugh at poor Ben Battle,[4] whose legs were removed by the cannon ball, but at the amusing juxtaposition of the legs and arms (warlike) in Hood's rather silly pun.

Yet, in spite of his lack of cruelty, in spite of the excellent company in which he finds himself (Aristophanes, Shakespeare, and other greats), the punster is frowned at in conversation, and his type of wit receives a very low rating from the critics. Stephen Leacock consigns it to the nursery, or at best the school yard,[5] and Max Eastman calls it a "dry, cerebral sport".[6] Let sport it is; and cerebral, too, and the critics are a little unfair, I think. If only on the negative basis of non-unkindness, plays on words deserve more honour. In addition, a language-lover will revel in playing with words, in twisting them around, in sensuously enjoying their musical or onomatopoetic sounds, in savouring their various meanings or shades of meaning. Surely, these practices are as respectable, if not as commendable, as the serious work of the philologists who

trace the origins of words and write vast (unread) tomes on a single letter. Of the philologues and the punsters, might it not be the latter who make the greater contribution to the language, by enriching it and keeping it alive and, above all, by interesting the lethargic public in it through laughter? They do not dig into the past; they thrust into the future.

Thus, while much has been said condemning plays on words as infantile, much can be said in their favour, because of their harmlessness. It is only when puns imply or connote something cruel that they partake of cruelty, and then only indirectly.

Have do force of verification lend to the reader the excitement and the magic of an arithmetic progression, or of the mathematical imagination of infinity, although, the mathematics, they are not of equal delight to everyone. However, they hurt nobody.

When poetry was aristocratic, the use of dialect, broken English, bad grammar, etc., had indeed a manner of superiority and snobbery; it was therefore unkind. In 19th century North America, however, along verse/became particularly popular; not because, as some sciduious European commentators would have it, of inferior educational standards (an illiterate man can see nothing funny in his own speech), but because they are a sign of successful revolt against authority. And the vast majority of Americans and Canadians are descended from rebels. Only the Indians can claim all-American ancestry; and all immigrants were people who rebelled against something: tyranny, poverty, bureaucracy, or merely monotony. If they had not, they would have stayed in the land of their birth.

ungrammatical verse, and badly spelled verse

In the Manner of Distortion, a sadistic tendency on the part of the writer can be expected, and on the part of the reader exploited. It is unkind to laugh when the horse eats the straw hat, or the youth walks into the well; it is snobbish of teetotallers to sneer at the drunken; it is cruel to enjoy the clown's yowl of pain, or the cuckold's confusion. Are there mitigating circumstances? One such might be the seriousness of the injury or the loss. When the horse eats the hat, the victim loses only an object of comparatively small monetary value, and presumably no other (sentimental, etc.) worth. If, however, the horse chewed off the man's arm, or ate his child, would not our horror prevent us from finding the event funny? Here again, however, is another mitigating circumstance. That a horse should chew off an arm or devour a child is so extremely unlikely that we should shout hilariously at the absurdity of the event, rather than at its cruelty or the seriousness of the loss. When Wallace eats up "young Albut, our son," we are entranced by the sheer fantasy of a lion's pulling a great lump of a boy through the narrow bars of his cage, and swallowing him in one gulp before his parents can protest or drag him back. To be sure, we do not mourn the loss unduly because Albut is none too lovable; but the real source of our laughter is the palpable impossibility of the whole thing. I have already mentioned the girls of St. Trinian's, (Chapter I, page 3) the enormity of whose crimes render them fantastic.

Again, a man whose own hat has been eaten by a horse may surely be allowed to laugh (sympathetically, of course) at the next victim. Tom's companions, each all too conscious of his own "milky, mulish dame", will not be amused condescendingly, as a re the superior sober, by the

witches, warlocks, and other fearfully funny phenomena; but with genuine exuberance.[10]

Development of this theme of justification of laughter could lead to such excesses as dividing the laughers into the justified and the merely jealous, and of creating a sort of alumni of hat-eating-horses victims who, as a squadron leader is permitted to blame the queen,[11] may with impunity enjoy hat-eating-horse jokes. Nevertheless, one principle does emerge: that if the laughter invoked by something that could not possibly have happened to the writer or reader because of his astuteness or other superiority, then the verse utilized to be unkind; whereas, if the incident could happen to all of us, or perhaps has happened to all of us; if we admit our fallibility, and laugh with, not at, the victim, then it is humane.

Universality of experience, too, must be a criterion of the kind or unkind in humour of character. The fact that a vice or folly is ridiculed would seem to make the genre harsh; but if that vice or folly is one which taints all of us in some measure, and if the character manifesting it is depicted as a type rather than as an individual, then the cruelty disappears, and the curative value of the comedy is uppermost. Hearing a character which can be identified with everyone in general and no one in particular cannot hurt. Urmio's penetrating remark is eminently applicable here: "S'allons point nous appliquer nous-mêmes les traits d'une censure générale; et profitons de la leçon, si nous pouvons, sans faire semblant qu'on parle à nous."[12]

Molière's Misanthrope[13] is perhaps the example par excellence of the ambivalent attitude, of laughing at and with a person, of

criticising and sympathising with him. The playwright has endowed Alceste with various visible idiosyncrasies: his silly habit of saying "Morbleu", and his other repetitions verbal and mental; his blind infatuation with a woman who is the embodiment of all he despises; and yet we identify him with the poet himself, and know historically as well as intellectually and intuitively that he is the spokesman for Molière's condemnation of the insincerities of the Court.

Like the Wit of Words, the Humour of Allusion, per se, cannot be untied. There are those who feel that any bookish reference is a braggart wit, a mere showing off of learning, and therefore snobbish. To be effective, however, an erudite jest will be directed only at and appreciated only by other savants whose learning and mental capacity are fully as great as those of the writer. It is offered to them as a treat and a tribute. The ignorant reader, whose feelings may be offended by a verse which goes over his head, simply does not participate in the Humour of Allusion.

Nevertheless, the Humour of Allusion, if it stings indirectly or by connotation, does so doubly by irritating old wounds. Swift's incredibly cruel "Modest Proposal", not in itself erudite, will recall to many minds the similar attempt at comedy (and the same savage indictment of social conditions) in Aristophanes' The Acharnians, where the peasant offers for sale his little daughters disguised as piglets.

Not only can these yardsticks be held up against the different types of humour, but also against the various methods of attaining humour. (Chapter III) As to Contradictions of the Conventional, there may be a subtle difference in their humanity. To laugh at a

person so odd as to be indifferent is unkind, because the laughter is inspired by self-complacency; but to lampoon something that has fallen short of the perfect, or to emphasize the difference between the actual and the ideal is a worthy thing.

Inaccuracies, I think, tend rather to be kind than unkind. It is the truth about human (especially our own) weakness that hurts, and an exaggeration (either stated or implied by understatement or irony) gives us an opportunity to avoid identifying ourselves completely with that weakness. Inaccuracy lends a merciful anonymity to a portrait, and turns it into a caricature, a type rather than an individual.

Comic imitation, partaking in the nature of the humour of allusion, will be bookish rather than kind or unkind. Parody, Mrs. Herbert Richardson maintains, is based on love or admiration for the original. While it would be difficult to subscribe wholeheartedly to this theory, its validity can be acknowledged.

Paradoxically, a topical insult is frequently an inverted compliment. When joking references are made to the members of the Town Council, the most annoyed Councillor will be the man whose name has been omitted. There is often an exuberance about a topical joke that, like a too hearty slap on the back, comes of good-will; and, like the pun, from a childish simplicity that may jar at the moment, but which should not be resented.

Finally, what is kind and what unkind in relation to the targets for mirth? (Chapter IV)

If an idea is intrinsically cruel, then its place in humour and probably its treatment by the humourist will be cruel. Once

again, the Aristotelian theory arises that something hurtful or offensive cannot be funny.[17] Thus the barbarous "Modest Proposal"[18] or its progenitor, the baby-selling, is so revolting that one can only shudder. As satire of the most mordant variety, it is undoubtedly effective; as humour, it is not, because it is not humorous.

On the other hand, there is the previously mentioned habit of whipping children to make them remember outstanding events. It was apparently a recognized practice, and people who thought anything about it at all considered it neither brutal nor peculiar. Yet Rabelais, by referring to it jestingly, then turning as if to say, "and you laugh at that", pointed out what an inhuman custom it was.

If the poet chooses as a butt something worthy and in itself blameless, then the verse would probably be branded as immoral rather than unkind. If he makes fun of a person for an oddity which is inherent and an act of God, such as imbecility or a club foot, then he is indeed being cruel. If the risible quality, however, is something that could have been avoided and that can be mended, then the laughter that arises is just rather than merciless, corrective rather than cruel.

The chaffing of traditional butts is in many cases a purely commercial thing. The Greek-comedy dotard, the mother-in-law of the vaudeville, all starry-eyed lovers unaware of the world, have been extremely reliable as laughter-producers, and the poets have frequently fallen back on them without any personal animus, and without really thinking them funny. But false and conventional ridicule can be as unkind as the bitter and intentional type. Is a man to be pardoned for hitting a cripple with his crutch because he bears him no ill-will?

Similarly, making fun of a helpless butt is sadistic; but if the opponent is well able to strike back, then no advantage is taken. When most women were without education, perhaps could not even read or write, however sharp their tongues, they were victimized when it came to the penning of witty and satiric verses by their masculine adversaries. Today, however, the female pen is as well armed as the male; to direct a nasty verse against a woman (or against women) is to throw down the gauntlet. In the ensuing combat, either contestant may be overthrown, but it will be a duel, not a murder.

On the whole, then, these principles seem to emerge: If a poet's purpose is instruction or the amendment of faults, then his treatment can be condoned if it is harsh. If the humour is purely an impersonal, intellectual exercise, it will stab no sensibilities. If it is completely fantastic and out of the world of ordinary experience, then an apparent callousness can be satisfactorily explained. If the person who laughs has a sympathetic attitude toward the thing laughed at, then the verse cannot be altogether unkind. If what is ridiculous is not inherent or irreparable, but acquired through perversity and can be made normal, or if the person ridiculed is an adversary who uses the same weapons of wit to retaliate, then the poetry will at least be fair play. Finally, if the experience is universal rather than particular, if the character is a type rather than an individual, and if the imperfection is measured closely or implicitly against the ideal, then the poetry will not be mere horseplay or idle amusement; it will be a step toward the discovery of truth.

NOTES TO CHAPTER V

1 There is a series of nursery songs, called Gentlemen Solen.

2 F. Rabelais, Pantagruel (Lerouxeau, Paris) Book IV, ch. xlviii.

3 James Joyce, Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man. (New American Library, 1948.)

4 Thomas Hood, "Ben Battle," The Book of Humorous Verse, compiled by Carolyn Wells, (Garden City, New York,) p. 797.

5 Stephen Leacock, Humour, its Theory and Technique, (Dodd, Mead & Co., New York, 1935) Chapter 2.

6 Max Eastman, The Enjoyment of Laughter, (Hamish Hamilton, London, 1937) p. 128.

7 Cf., e.g. the volumes written on the "Aot" in Le Chanson de Roland, or the research of the philologist Thurneau on the Greek letter gamma.

8 Stanley Holloway, "Albert and the Lion."

9 Robert Burns, "Tam O'Shanter," Poems, (American Publishers Corporation, New York)

10 Husbands who suspect the fidelity of their wives find it difficult to laugh at the old cuckold joke. As Clarence Day puts it in "Homeless," (Wells, Op. Cit., p. 978)

> Homeless, Homeless,
> How we feel for you,
> We, who fear that wives betray us,
> Even when we're true.
> Husbands daily die of bile,
> But oh, despite their sobbing,
> Paris seems a hateful exile
> And Helen's heart is throbbing.

11. At the formal monthly dinner of the Officers' Mess of the R.A.F., it is the sacred duty of the President of the Mess to propose the toast to the Queen, but he does not do so directly. He rises to his feet and as the other officers follow him, he addresses the Vice-President of the Mess. Raising the traditional glass of port, he says, "Mr. Vice, the Queen." The Vice-President, raising his glass, says, "Gentlemen, the Queen," whereupon all the officers clink glasses and, before drinking, say, "The Queen," but only those of rank squadron leader or above are permitted to add, "God Bless Her."

12 Molière, La Critique de l'Ecole des Femmes, (Larousse, Paris,) scène vi.

13 Molière, Les Précieuses. (Larousse, Paris)

14 J. Swift, "A Modest Proposal", 18th Century Poetry and Prose, ed. Ernstvold, etc., (The Ronald Press Co., New York)

15 Aristophanes, The Acharnians. (Macmillan, London, 1909) Act I.

16 Mrs. Herbert Richardson, Parody. (The English Association, Pamphlet, No. 92, August 1930.)

17 Aristotle, Poetics, 1449 a 32 (Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1909)

CHAPTER VI

HUMOUR IN GREEK AND ROMAN TIMES

If it were possible to reduce to percentages the kindliness, sympathy, and general humanity manifested by the humorous poetry of a language and to plot them on a graph, the resultant diagram for the centuries from the Greek Iambics to modern English verse might resemble a temperature chart of Manitoba weather from January to July. Certainly, the quality of mercy seems to have been a minus quantity to the early Greek vituperators, and would register a solid 60° below zero of that we today imagine to be ordinary compassion.

The Iambics were a genre of verse first appearing about 660 B.C.[1] The use of the Iambic metre which, according to Aristotle, was the most akin to ordinary prose, gave them a colloquial touch, and made them an excellent vehicle for abuse. They were scurrilous, bitter, obscene. The most outstanding writers were Archilochus, Simonides, and Hipponax, of whom for the greatest exponent of invective was Hipponax. He attacked his enemies by name in language that was coarse, dialectic, and incredibly brutal. From what historians say, laughter at his sallies seems impossible to our sensibilities, and the wit, if any, must have been lost in sheer venom. If his work was lively and epigrammatic, and he was perhaps the father of the modern sprung line, in that he invented the scliambic, or limping Iambic, where a humorous effect is attained by an unexpected rhythmic turn at the end.[2]

Had I been able to find any of his verse to quote, the iambics of Hipponax would surely have given me a prime example of cruelty in ridicule.[4] In physique, the poet was ugly and misshapen, a circumstance that inspired two sculptors of his time, Bupalus and Athenis, to represent him in marble, grossly exaggerating all his worst features. In revenge, he wrote lampoons so merciless that both were said to have hanged themselves.[5]

According to Professor Mary A. Grant,[6] "the iambic morality throughout is personal and spiteful" — It offered "no unselfish motive of service to the state in the rebuking of evil, but merely the gratification of personal revenge."

Nor was the Old Comedy, which began, roughly speaking, during the first half of the 5th century, B.C., any more humane, however superior it may have been from a literary standpoint. Critics frequently deplore the unbridled licence of its invective. Yet, with Aristophanes, the playwrights claimed the noble purpose of amendment through satire.[6] To be sure, Cleon was a tyrant, and Aristophanes ridiculed him unceasingly:

> Our Cleonymus, I fancy, would have thrown his cr-et away.[7]

He may also have had a purely altruistic motive in writing,

> In the way that Thor-goion grew to be rich
> From a scoundrelly, dirty collector of tribute.[8]

or

> Dirty Cleigenes the small
> He, the sovreign of the bath.[9]

but one is inclined to wonder. In attacking the deleterious effects of the new learning, the sophistical rhetoric and speculation, in

the person of Socrates.[10] Aristophanes employed every weapon he could lay his pen to. Hilariously, he made fun of Socrates' unmanly figure and other physical defects, which surely had nothing to do with his teachings.

It seems indisputable that the taste of the Athenian audience had more than a little sadism in it. We are told of the huge delight of the groundlings over the baby-selling scene of the Megarian starveling[11], when the actors may well have been overlooked.[12] We are led to believe, too, that the scene from The Frogs[13] where Bacchus and Xanthias undergo ordeal by beating to determine which is the god elicited as many guffaws for the blows themselves as for the contest of endurance or for the more subtle wit of Bacchus' turning an expletive of pain into a quotation, e.g.,

Poseidon! —
— Who rulest the Aegean peaks and extremes
And over the depths of the sea. (Sophocles)[14]

Such were the excesses of the Old Comedy that philosophers began to evolve theories of what was and what was not permissible in comic poetry. Here Professor Grant's scholarly thesis[15] gives much enlightening information on the subject. Considerable thought was expended on the basic morality and the dignity of laughter; it was debated whether or not a gentleman should allow himself such frivolity. The writers — Cleobulus, Chilon, Solon, Pythagoras, Heraclitus, Xenophon, Gorgias, and Plato, among others — were for the most part agreed that a little laughter in moderation and in the right places was legitimate. Aristotle attributes to Anacharsis the saying, "Be merry that you may be serious." while "In paragraph 170 of Demetrius," says Professor Grant, "the

employment of laughter by the Cynics in the rebuking of evil is mentioned in connection with ordinary social use of banquets, and the poetry of Crates is given as an example.[14] It was even acknowledged that there was a rhetorical value in turning a serious matter to mirth, and that a man was justified in using comic invective to win a case, on the grounds that stupidity deserved attack.[15] Nevertheless, Plato, for one, was rigid in his denunciation of unconfined laughter; it was simply bad manners, he averred.[16]

By the time the New Comedy (circa 350-250 B.C.) had reached the boards, one could almost say that the sage advice offered by the scribes had been formulated into a code. When Aristotle came to deal with the subject, a sharp distinction had been made between the liberal and the illiberal jest. Unrestrained or excessive language was to be avoided as ungentlemanly; jokes indecent in language or in subject matter, and those which caused pain, were to be eschewed as unbecoming, fitting only for slaves.

Aristotle's condemnation of the iambics and of the Old Comedy (according to Professor Grant) was based on 1) their personal abuse, which violated his principle that poetry should be general and not specific; 2) the pain caused by their bitterness, since pain is no element of the ridiculous; and 3) the indecency of their language.

In spite of the fact that both Plato and Aristotle insisted that the ridiculous did not comprise the painful, and that laughter should not cause distress, both philosophers agreed that "faults and deformities of nature are the source of the ridiculous."[18] "Wit," said Aristotle, "is educated insolence."[19]

The New Comedy, definitely more polite, admittedly less virulent,

and certainly more subtle than the Old, could allow us to record a slight rise on our temperature chart; but it would be from a lessening of the icy and cutting blasts of cruelty rather than from any infusion of the warm air of human kindness. If we take the "Menaechmi"[20] as an example, we still find the constant spirit of mockery that allows the audience to feel superior and unsympathetic to the characters on the stage. Of these, there is no estimable one. They are the types laughed at everywhere: the doddering old man, the grasping parasite, the blistering-tongued wife, the deceiving husband, (to be derided or approved), the quack doctor, the astute courtesan. There is the opportunity afforded to laugh at madness and the beating of slaves. The constant elimination of morality would have, as with the Restoration Comedy, aroused the vituperation of a Jeremy Collier; but that is a question of morality, not of humanity. The "Menaechmi" is an excellent comedy, extremely funny, but not at all kind.

The dicta of the philosophers on the subject of the liberal or the illiberal just seem all to have been subjective. Although Democritus, the "laughing philosopher", had said, "To not laugh at the misfortunes of others, but pity them",[21] the criterion seems to have been propriety rather than compassion. To use obscene language, to express vulgar thoughts, to make a butt of another person, were inherently unseemly, not because they made the listeners uncomfortable, or because they distressed the laughing-stock, but because they detracted from the dignity of the perpetrator of such jests. Professor Grant makes no observation, and there seems to be no record of any condemnation of the making fun of a slave. Indeed, it was acknowledged that obscenity, vulgarity, and spitefulness were the portion of the

base-born.[22] How can a wit ever to direct the laughter of himself. A gentleman had to hide from the world any fault or deformity, any self-ignorance, any unfortunate circumstance or incident which would tend to make him ludicrous. Moreover, I have not been able to find in any of Professor Grant's studies up to this point (or elsewhere) any allowance for the spontaneity of mirth.

When Plutarch came to write on the subject, however,[23] he made a special stipulation that joking should not be studied or deliberate, but should rise naturally, "like a bread at a banquet."[24] Further, he volunteered the inconsistent statement that jesting was kinder if the jester ridiculed himself as well as others, e.g., if a poor man were to make fun of poverty. The company present at a gathering was always to be taken into account; chaffing among friends was quite permissible, but no one was to be made a laughing-stock if his wife, his father, or his teacher happened to be there.

Like all the others, Plutarch postulated that witticisms should give pleasure instead of pain, but where his predecessors had clung to abstract principles, he became practical and made concrete suggestions as to the proper subject matter for banter. One could ingrate certain faults to a man who was free of those faults, and pleasure not pain would result, because good qualities would be brought into prominence. One could humorously call good qualities by uncomplimentary names. One could counterfeit blame to show gratitude, as Diogenes said of his teacher, Antisthenes, "He was the one who made a beggar of me, and drove me from my home."

Plutarch advocated the deriding of innocent hobbies, but not of moral defects; one could tease a friend for his love of music or

of hunting, but never for his ugliness or for his pugnacious disposition. One could laugh at hooked or snub noses, but not at foul breath; at baldness, yes, but at the loss of an eye, never. It would depend on the individual whether or not it would be seemly to make fun of humpbacks or lowns.

While I cannot see eye to eye with Plutarch throughout all his delicate differentiations in playfulness, the contrast between his semi-decorousness and, on the one hand, the boisterous brutality of Aristophanes' comedy, or, on the other, the needle-like pain by which Plato's Socrates deflated bombast, is most evident. Plutarch is arguing for humour of the highest type; unfortunately, he did not leave any humorous poetry.

Of the Romans, Cicero devoted much time to the laughable as it was bound to the theories of propriety. He recommended avoidance of such wit as was exemplified by the mimes because of excess, indecency, lack of dignity, (they allowed themselves to be laughed at; indeed they invited such laughter) and lack of any intellectual quality. The comedy, he said, made too frequent jokes, and were completely indifferent to the pain they caused. Cicero also condemned the personal attacks and the obscenity of the Old Comedy.

Yet, in spite of his emphasis on the avoidance of pain, Cicero followed Aristotle in saying, "The ground and, as it were, the province of the ridiculous ... lies in a certain baseness and deformity." "Words may be nicely turned also," he added, "on deformity and bodily defects."

Max Eastman quotes a joke of Cicero's "about a man who came weeping to his friend and said his wife had just hanged herself on a

fig tree in his garden. The friend, also a married man, said, "I wonder if I might procure some slips of that same tree to plant in my garden." This story, like the"Nonsense", is both funny and unkind.

It is undoubtedly in the definition of the painful that our thinking diverges most widely from that of the classic writers who sought, in condemning illiberal jests, to establish propriety in laughter.

Footnotes to Chapter VI

1 F.D. Allen, "Iambics," article in the Universal Cyclopaedia, (Appleton & Co., 1901.)

2 Aristotle, Poetics, c. 1449 a. (Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1909)

3 B.L. Gildersleeve, "Hipponax" articel in the Universal Cyclopaedia, op. cit.

4 Beechum, in Aristophanes' The Frogs, mentions a verse of Hipponax, but does not quote it. (Modern Library) p. 248. The Gildersleeve article states that about 100 lines of Hipponax' poetry are still extant.

5 Mary A. Grant, The Ancient Rhetorical Theories of the Iambic. (University of Wisconsin Studies in Language and Literature, No. 21.)p.60. Professor Grant cites as the major authority on iambics the Gerhard article "Iambographen" in the Pauly-Wissowa Real-Encyclopädie, 1916)

6 See also Chapter IV, footnote 24, page 56, of this thesis.

7 Aristophanes, The Birds, (Macmillan, London, 1909) l. 890.

8 ——— The Frogs, (Modern Library) p. 230.

9 Ibid., p. 250.

10 Aristophanes, The Clouds, (Macmillan, London, 1909)

11 ——— The Athenians, (Macmillan, London, 1909) See also Paul Shorey, "Aristophanes," Library of the World's Best Literature, (Peale & Hill, New York,) Vol. II.

12 ——— The Frogs, op. cit. p. 247-8.

13 Ibid, p. 248

14 Aristotle, Ethics, (Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1908) x.6.6. 1176.b.33.

15 Grant, op. cit. p. 57

16 Ibid. p. 65.

17 Eng. Max Eastman, The Enjoyment of Laughter. (Hamish Hamilton, London) p. 307, quotes Plato as saying "Persons of worth should not be represented as overcome by laughter." In Philebus, 48-50, Plato makes Socrates say that the ridiculous arises from self-ignorance. In the great, it may be harmful; in the feeble, only funny: a distinction which, to my mind, speaks for itself.

18 Grant, op. cit. p. 69.

19 Aristotle, Rhetoric. (Clarendon Press,) 15, 16, 1369 b.

20 Plautus, "Pseudolus," An Introduction to Drama, ed. Mabell S. Berry, (Macmillan, New York)

21 Grant, op. cit. p. 17.

22 Ibid. p. 86

23 Plutarch, Quaestiones Convivales, (Clarendon Press, London) II 1 1 ff.

24 Loc. cit.

25 Cicero, De Oratore, and Lucian

26 ----, De Oratore, II.58, quoted by Professor Craig, in his appendix to The Rare Book of Laughter and Comedy, (Geo. Allen & Unwin, Ltd., London, 1925)

27 Ibid. II. 59.

28 Eastman, op. cit. p. 309.

CHAPTER VII

THE MIDDLE AGES

"The fault, then, of Shakespeare's muse," wrote William Hazlitt in 1819,[1] "is, in my opinion, that it is too good-natured and magnanimous — it does not take the highest pleasure in making human nature look as mean, as ridiculous, and contemptible as possible."

If I had been rash enough to set out to prove that all humour prior to the 20th century was cruel, and that the soil which allows the germination and growth of kindly and sympathetic laughter has existed in no generation except my own, then I, too, and even more petulantly than Hazlitt, should find this fault in Shakespeare. On the same grounds — that he had upset my theory — I should also quarrel with Chaucer. But while (to cling to my metaphor of the Manitoba weather) there were comic giants, the warmth of whose sunny dispositions and love of mankind created a zone of Tonepical them, the temperature of those early days of English humour was still definitely sub-zero. It was indeed a frigid season, sympathetically speaking.

As if fifteen centuries had not rolled by, there was still in the Middle Ages in England the coarse brutality of the old Comedy, and the niggling superiority of the ironic deflation of bombast. The[2] envelope of invective burst from the satirists, as bitter and obscene as had been the curse of the Iambic poets and the sources; but the mediaeval satires were not funny, nor were they intended to be. They were not levelled at personal enemies, but against the universal foe of all mankind: Sin. At the same time, in higher, more refined circles, the church fathers debated every possible issue, attaching each thread of argument to the

associated stopping point of absurdity, pricking every factual bubble with a fine point of sophistry.

Mirth was for the people. Aristocratic poetry was courtly, idealistic, and increasingly artificial; its popular complement was realistic and down-to-earth. While in the minstrels' gallery, the jongleurs sang the exploits of the heroes or the deathless and completely spiritual love of the high-born, in the market-place, the ballad-mongers bawled the news, and among those who could read, manuscripts circulated that narrated all sorts of fascinating tales, or that poked fun at hated people. The robust English sense of humour could not keep laughter out of even the most solemn occasions. Mrs. Noah will not enter the ark without her gossips, and a lot of hilarious horseplay follows until she can be persuaded to take cover. The Wakefield Second Shepherds' Play is a Christian nativity only in its last two scenes. Otherwise it is a comic interlude, which might be interpreted as an anal burlesque on the birth of Christ.

Satirical verses [6] appeared, the justification of their frankness, as in Aristophanes' day and as always, the rebuking of evil. The luxurious and sensual living of the friars was attacked in such verses as the "Song against the Friars":

> Men may see by their countenance, (song the poet with
> sorrowful irony)
> That they are men of great penance,
> And also that their maintenance
> Simple is and coyne.
> I have lyved now fourty yere,
> And fatter men about the nere
> Nit saw I never than are these frere,
> In contreye ther they goyne. [7]

In the same vein are "The Minorit Friary" [8] (answered but not refuted by "The Reply of Friar Daw Topias") and the gay and imaginative

"The Lord of Coloigne."[10]

Women come under the glaring searchlight of derision in the highly humorous, "The Goodys' Feast."[11] Here the wives of the village meet, unbeknown to their husbands, in a tavern, to feast, to drink, and above all to talk merrily.

Of the merry tales, there were numerous beast epics and fables, where all Aesop's creatures appeared and re-appeared, wearing medieval guise and talking Middle English. The difference between Aesop's "The Fox and the Wolf" and that of the Digby MS[12] is not one of plot and character, but of dialogue and flavour.

From France came fabliaux,[13] of which the most outstanding and enjoyable is "Dame Sirith",[14] where a trick, a successful bit of roguery, is told with zest. Wilekin, a clerk, makes advances to Dame Margaret in the absence of her husband; but she, declaring herself both virtuous and in love with her lord, will have none of him. Desperate, Wilekin goes for help to the crafty old woman, Dame Sirith, who agrees to aid him (at a price, of course). She doses her dog with pepper and mustard and takes her to see Dame Margaret, who comments on the poor animal's running eyes. Sirith replies piteously that this is her daughter who, married to a man she loved, refused the advances of a clerk in holy orders, and as a punishment for her haughtiness, was turned into a bitch who weeps continuously for her sad condition. The sight terrorizes Margaret, who confesses that she, too, has turned down a clerk. Sirith sympathetically offers to help (for a price, of course) and promises to use her influence with Wilekin to induce him to renew his attentions to Margaret. This she does, and Wilekin hastens back to Margaret, who receives him with loving words, "Turnd ich have mi thout."[15]

Of the tales which fall into the classification of ballads rather than fabliaux, "Robin Hood and the Monk"[16] may be cited. At Whitsuntide, Robyn resolves to go to church, so steals into St. Mary's of Nottingham to pray. There he is betrayed by a monk; but is rescued by Littull John and Much, who, to effect his revenge, kill the monk, the monk's page, and the porter.

In all the narrative verses, whether English or French, three laughing-stocks seem to be the favourites: the rulers, the clergy, and the women.[17] The ruler may be a feudal baron or a sheriff (a rich bourgeois was frequently substituted), but he is always someone luckier, presumably, than the poet and the reader; hence his reverses of fortune is very welcome. Littull John wrests Robyn from under the very nose of the sheriff of Nottingham, and at the expense of the "great-headed monks", neither of whom is described in any friendly fashion. "Estrif"[18] ends, somewhat smugly, I think, "Thus those who smile in the morning weep at eve, and he who is wrathful in the evening was joyous and gay in the morning."(lines 140-5).

Reaction against the extravagant adulation of courtly poetry made the writers of humorous verse, in contrast to the troubadour who exalted femininity to superhuman heights, debase women to something lower than the beasts. Wives, especially, were shown up as being sensual, shrewish, gossipy:

> For, as ever I read epistle, [said the second shepherd]
> I have one to my fere
> As sharp as a brimble, as rough as a briar;
> She is browed like a bristle, with a sour [looking] cheer;
> And she once wet her whistle she could sing full clear
> Her pater noster.
> She is great as a whale,
> She has a gallon of gall;
> By Him that died for us all,
> I would I had run till I lost her! (Scene 1, stanza 18)

And Mak, in spite of the fact that Gill proves herself a reliable accomplice in a tight corner, complains bitterly of her slattery, idleness, and constant child-bearing. (Stanzas 27-8) Mrs. Noah is reported as greeting her poor old bedraggled husband by first demanding his money, then, on finding he has lost it, by calling down a horrible curse upon him. But the poet goes even with her; "she, the wretch," he says, "lived on in sorrow and lunatic frenzy." (l. 65.)

With the exception of such pointedly satiric verses as the "Song against the Friars" and its ilk, the merry poetry of this period seems to have been written mainly for entertainment. Rebuking of evil or amendment of manners appears to be incidental; the plot, the story, and scrolls the joke, is the main thing.

It may be observed, too, that, with a few exceptions, the poets were perhaps not sufficiently at home in their medium (or their readers could not appreciate it) to indulge in the "dry cerebral sport" of punning and the other forms of the wit of words. But there are doubtless entendres a-plenty. One can imagine the delighted guffaws of the audience at Gill's announce,

> I pray to God so mild,
> If ever I you beguiled,
> That I eat this child,
> That lies in this cradle. (sc. vi, st. 6)

or of the knowing snickers of the readers when, at the very beginning of "Noah Sirith", Margeri hospitably offers to do anything, anything, to please Wilkin. (Stanzas 6 et.seq.) There are, too, a few amusing rhymes in "The Second Shepherds' Play": pater-noster--lost hen(scene 1, st. 12); hen I--penny (sc. viii, st. 58), etc.

The fun, however, is for the most part, found in the humour of situation; and clever characterizations, like the satire, are incidental. Trick and counter-trick are played on unsuspecting victims; successful rascality brought unfailing laughter. The plots are simple, but well worked out.

One cannot expect that the humour, written for the people and picked up from them, should be refined. Obscenity has been screened out of the school books, but the bites and scratches of unkindness remain. That the songs against the friars struck home, causing discomfort or embarrassment, to say the least, is proved by "The Reply of Friar Don Topias." [9] It is not likely that any comm would commit suicide, as did Epponan's victim, [20] on hearing "The Cocaigne" feast" read, jolly and good-natured as the banter appears on the surface; yet the references to wife-beating,

> A strype or two God myght send me,
> If my husband myght here see me, (St. 9)

or

> For my husband is so fell
> He betith me lyke the devill of hell;
> And the more I cryo,
> The lesse mercy,
> Good gossipis myn, al, (St. 12)

seeming to us because fantastic, must have inspired only a sadistic type of mirth in the 15th century when wife-beating was no joke (to the wife). To be sure, the poet has taken the woman's part in the words of the valiant Alle, "I dred no man," St. 9) and of the even more valiant Margret, who knows

> ---- no man that is alyve
> That giveth me ill strokes, but that he shall have v, (St. 17)

but I feel that he has done so not so much from sympathy, as to raise

a louder laugh from a man-bites-dog joke. Certainly, he and his masculine readers will enjoy a hearty sense of their own superiority.

Certainly, too, there was a fear of ridicule in the Middle Ages, although perhaps not so much in England as in France. "Let no bad song be sung about us!" [25] said Roland before Roncevel, regardless of the fact that facetious songs have circulated in every army; Caesar himself was not spared by his soldiers." [26] It is not only the noble and pig-headed [27] Roland who dreads the cruel humor of the mob; the knight's servant [28], whom Renart by his sharp wit and even sharper teeth forces to release him, begins to weep from sorrow, because he'll be taken for a fool. (lines 81-85).

Whether or not any of the humorous poems of the day succeeded in causing pain, it cannot be disputed that all I have mentioned evoke laughter by relating about pain, sorrow, discomfort, or embarrassment. (See Chapter v, page 61) Englishmen of the 13th century laughed as heartily as had the Greeks of Aesop's day over Renard's triumph over Isengrin, even though the fox actually plays a dirty trick on the wolf, but adds mental to physical cruelty by jeering at him when he is at the bottom of the well, suffering both discomfort and embarrassment, and possibly pain and sorrow as well.

To be sure, the blood shed by Little John and Much [29] is condoned by the King himself because a faithful lieutenant has saved his captain, and by the poet because the trick was played on a luxurious and treacherous cleric and a drunken sheriff (although the page and the porter can be blamed for no fault). Then, too, in the "Second Shepherds' Play", the naughty couple, Mak and Gill, did not succeed in bamboozling the simple shepherds; and there is poetic justice in the fact that the kindly Jesus

that led the Shepherd to turn back to offer a gift to the little new baby was the means of discovering the hoax.

In most of the plots, however, the villainy is successful, and the victim not only guileless but guiltless. Dame Ragnyert is chaste and faithful, and errs only because of a not unreasonable unwillingness to become a dog. (Although perhaps it could be argued that she was stupidly credulous, and willing to abandon her virtue to save her skin.) The only vice in Ketele's masters was their comfortable circumstances, while the priest, so poor that he did not even have shoes, surely did not deserve to lose his stole. Brifaut is represented as a stupid old man, but his greater crime was his wealth.

Even if the poets have not taken "the highest pleasure in making human nature look as mean, as ridiculous, and contemptible as possible," they have shown the scorn of superiority; and they reveal human nature in none too favourable a light. The recurrent comic (and despicable?) types appear: the crafty, venal old woman; the ruthless importunate lover; the victim, artless or stupid; the silly old man; the thieving rogue.

It may be argued that humorous episodes such as these, so palpably addressed to the masses, cannot be expected to show the sympathy, the humanity, and the understanding manifested by the gentle-born. What, then, of the wrench of Chaucer who, after all, wrote for the court, for the intelligentsia of his day, for the loftiest minds of all ages?

If all the pilgrims were not fictitious, if Chaucer was depicting flesh-and-blood contemporaries in such creatures as the

Pardoner, the Cook, the Monk, the Friar, the Summoner, and others, then his descriptions must have burnt like dry ice. Yet his harshness is justified on the grounds of decent. Even peculiarity of appearance is linked up with moral turpitude. The ginger-coloured, spade-shaped beard of the Miller was taken to indicate treachery, and the loathsome sore on the Cook's leg is unmistakably venereal.

As Chaucer was infinitely more artistic than the other humorous poets of the Middle Ages, he was infinitely more selective in his severity. Knavish characters tell the obscene or unkind stories; and always it is pointed out that the victims of the jokes are deserving of their fate by their own villainy or by avoidable stupidity. The Reeve's miller was only paid for his th[illegible]ieving ways. (But an indication that Chaucer was touched by mediaeval callousness in humour is that the wife and daughter, also victimized by the clerks' jolly revenge, are considered not as characters but as chattels.) The poet takes good care that pity shall not be wasted on the Miller's poor old carpenter, because he begins the tale by telling of the "riche gnof" who had wedded a girl of eighteen when he should have known that "youthe and old is ofte nat dobest." (l. 3230) He could see the company laughing immoderately at deceived Innocence, but was there one who did not deserve his horns? (In Chaucer's eyes, at least.)

The coarse brutality of mediaeval chaffing is manifested in the remarks of "oure Hoost", the roughness of whose tongue, even in jest, must have drawn blood from the Pardoner , the Monk, and others.

It can hardly be argued that Chaucer's comedy is based on universals. The very ingeniousness of the plots, the uncanny individuality of his portraiture, deprive them of universality, make them full

into the category of Contradictions of the Conventional. Chaucer has made the comical most of failings and deformities, physical, moral, and social.

On the other hand, Chaucer again shows himself to be kinder in his laughter than his contemporaries, in that he allows the laughter to be drawn to himself. By fathering the artificial, romantic jingle of his Thopas, he takes the sting out of his sly satire of all the over-romantic metrical tales. Yet this step toward what I should like to prove to be modernity in humour is a very small one. Usually Chaucer will not bear the brunt of his own banter; even here he is confessing a fault that no man can ascribe to him. Usually he does not exhibit in his own self the humorous fallibility of all mankind.

Against my own argument, too, is the geniality of tone and the general tolerance shown throughout the Prologue and elsewhere. In refutation, I can only fall back on my original metaphor that the warmth of Chaucer's humour, like the Aeropial thaw, was not an indication of any amelioration of winter, but of an unseasonable, though welcome, period of sunshine.

FOOTNOTES TO CHAPTER VII

1 W. Hazlitt, "Lectures on the English Comic Writers," Works, Vol. VI, (J.M. Dent & Sons, Ltd., London) p. 20.

2 Max Beerbohm, in The Enjoyment of Laughter, (Hamish Hamilton, London) p. 228, has some interesting remarks on the "narrow monotony in the Greek conception of Comedy as a perpetual showing up of the overbold."

3 Here "mediaeval satire" is used in the narrow technical sense of sermon against sin, distinguished from the more well-known meaning of Augustinian satire, so popular in 18th century England.

4 Noah's Flood, miracle play, is mentioned in the Introduction to Drama, ed. Nicholl and Noyes, (Macmillan, New York) p. 61.

5 Wakefield Cycle, "The Second Shepherds' Play", Introduction to Drama, op. cit. scene i.

6 Here I am using satire in the dictionary meaning of "use of ridicule, sarcasm, or irony, to expose folly." (Oxford English Dictionary.)

7 "Song Against the Friars," (1308) A Literary Middle English Reader, ed. Cook, (Ginn & Co., Boston, etc.) p. 361

8 "On the Minorite Friars," Cook, op. cit. p. 364.

9 "The Reply of Friar Bon Topico," Cook, op. cit. p. 366.

10 "The Land of Cokaigne," Cook, op. cit. p. 367.

11 "The Goodye' Feast," Cook, op. cit. p. 370.

12 "The Fox and the Wolf," Cook, op. cit. p. 100.

13 See André Lévêque, Histoire de la Civilization France/PP. (H. Holt & Co., New York,) p. 81.

14 "Dame Sirith", Cook, op. cit. p. 141.

15 Ibid, l. 10.

16 "Robin Hood and the Monk", Cook, op. cit. p. 120.

17 Lévêque, loc. cit.

18 "Betoia", Onomatophie de l'Ancien Français, ed. Constans (G.E. Stechert & Co., New York, 1932)

19 "Deifrut," ed. Constans, op. cit.

20 Eastman, op. cit. p. 139

21 The child" was, of course, the ebeu.

22 Cf. Chapter VI, page 74.

23 "Chanson de Roland," ed. Jenkins, (D.C. Heath & Co., Boston, etc.) Leipsic 1924.

24 Jenkins, op. cit. Footnote 1014, p. 82.

25 Out of sheer pride or obstinacy (the critics are undecided which) Roland allowed his army to be slaughtered rather than summon help by blowing his horn. The wiser Olivier pleaded with him in vain. Roland dreaded the "bel esgar."

26 Onomatophie, op. cit. "Karun de Bonart" (8).

27 See para. 1, page 80, of this chapter.

28 G. Chaucer, "The Miller's Tale,"Centenary Edition. Works. (Houghton, Mifflin, Boston) 1. 3106.

29 In a chapter called "The Pardoner's Secret," of his book, Chaucer and the Mediaeval Sciences. (Oxford University Press, 1926) Walter Clyde Curry propounds the theory that the Pardoner was impotent; thus "ars Bonet's" jibes would be particularly offensive.

CHAPTER VIII

THE RENAISSANCE

Humanism, born in and of the Renaissance, turning, as it did, men's eyes from heaven and "divine" theology to mundane affairs, should, one might expect, have engendered a greater sympathy in one man toward another, a greater tolerance for earthborn foibles and frailties. Certainly, the constant medieval preoccupation with sin, the realization, if not the belief, that because of the fall, man was a vile creature, foul in body and feeble in spirit, gave way to a realization of human worth, a glorification of the mind, soul, and senses. Where the thirteenth century thinkers were urged to forswear the world "for the fraile of owre flesch, and the many temptaciouns that we ar ameett with, that lettes us nyght and day,"[2] men of the sixteenth century were led to contemplate "what a piece of work is man -- in action, how like an angell! in apprehension, how like a God!"[3] The new attitude raised the status of man in poetry as well as in society.

Yet, while men came to a greater admiration of man in general, they continued to despise various and sundry of their fellows, especially those who in any way proved inconvenient. Invective and satire were no less biting. Even as the unknown poet had used his pen as a weapon against the Friars, so Henry Howard invented scathing verses in defence of conduct which might have been forgiven, but which could not be defended.[5] Using an attack tactics as old as wrong-doing itself, his piece is witty and paradoxical, a burlesque on the style of the petrarchists, and perhaps in parts a parody on one

of their words. But it is cruel with all the arrogance of sneering superiority, of contempt for bourgeois virtue and wealth:

> Thy wiedowes had don me no spight
> Ne proud purple that dredo me fell
> Clothed with falshod and unright
> Ded in the clennes of thy well. 6

Here the Earl of Surrey has done his best to inflict pain, sorrow, discomfort and embarrassment upon the citizens of London.

A jollier, gentler type of humour, satire not invective, is found in Humfrey Gifford's "A Delectable Dream." Sharp criticism of women, even of women in general, would not, I imagine, be any too well received in Elizabeth's reign. So Gifford, tongue in cheek, (perhaps, like the bumper's "tied with strings unto his heart") acknowledges all his faults, and veils his censure in palpable, nonsensical absurdities:

> Also four fingers and a thumb
> Might now be seen upon each hand
> His lips were placed above his chin. 10

In spite of such invective and satire, in spite of the more telling satire shown in Ben Jonson's Comedy of Humours (to be discussed later), in spite of the "delightful teaching" propounded by Sidney, for the most part, the purpose of the English Renaissance poets was pure entertainment. The fascination which the language exerted over them enabled them to discover -- or at least to manifest to the world more completely than has been done in any other century -- that laughter can be a "purely cerebral sport", and need not depend on the perverse superiority of one man over another nor upon the ludicrous misfortune of any human being. Words, they found, could be fully as amusing as "failings and deformities."; philology offered

them endless opportunities for mirth in playing with those words which they so dearly loved. All that has been said in defense of the paronomasia (see Chapter V, pages 63-4) has perhaps been only a preparation for mentioning the Nicobothens' use of this most mental (if elemental) of all comic ratio. A turn of phrase delighted them; alliteration appealed not only to the ear but to the funny. Shakespeare himself was Thomas Nord's master in his punning sequences of Love's Labour's Lost;[14] it was he who offered the fishery of "the playful princess." One can conjure up the riotous company at the Swan, roaring out the silly nonsense to the tapping of their flagons. The verse is a far cry from wit or clever comedy, but it is language study of a sort, and it scars no man's skin.

"Jests which slay the face", said that great jester, Cervantes,[15] "are not good jests." He himself, possibly to avoid slapping the face, made great use of the purely rhetorical, and therefore innocuous, devices for humour. "Not only in Spain," he said grandly, "but over all Lebanchu."[16] Benedict was later to copy this trick of anti-climax in swearing, "I will live in thy heart, die in thy lap, and be buried in thy eyes; and moreover I will go with thee to thy uncle's."[17]

In one way, however, the word-wit of the Nicobothens was definitely untried. Their use of broken English to evoke laughter in making fun of foreigners is both contemptuous and overdone. It is hard to believe that a "yonge wealthy Italian marchant" would express himself, "Not cund, here be de great devil ery boh, boh, boh, been Cr'ssen I tinke —", etc., and even harder to find the dialogue funny; but no doubt the readers of the time were vastly amused.

Another aspect of cerebral sport, but on a higher level, is the flamboyance enjoyment of comic imitation. Michael Drayton's *Nymphidia* exploits the mock-heroic, with all its delightful possibilities. No trace of helpless mirth with roll down cheeks crimsoned with laughter upon reading this poem, but chuckles at its cuteness will break from those whose erudition is equal to a full enjoyment of it. To be sure, there may be a touch of malice in ridiculing the serious writers of epics, but this is lost in the pleasure of the mental exercise.

Into burlesque and parody, more than into the mock-heroic, malevolence can enter more than a little. It is said that the courtly amour cycles became so increasingly artificial and absurd that inevitably they were laughed out of existence by such burlesques as the "amorous, odious sonnet" of Gabriel Harvey and the nine gulling sonnets of Sir John Davies.

But the originals, such as

> I burn yet I am cold; I am a-cold, yet burn.
> In pleasing, discontent; in discontentment, pleased.
> Diseased, I am in health; and healthful, am diseased.
> In turning back, proceed; proceeding, I return.
> In mourning I rejoice; and in rejoicing, mourn.
> In pro-ceeding, I stop back; in stepping back, I proceed.
> In gaining, still I lose; and in my losses, gain.
> Grounded, I wander still; and wavering, still am grounded.
> Unwounded, yet not sound; and being sound, am wounded.
> Slain, yet am I alive; and yet alive, am slain.
> Bounded, my heart rests still; still reaching, is it bounded.
> In pain, I feel no grief; yet void of grief, in pain.
> Unmoved, I vex myself; unvexed, yet am I moved.
> Beloved, she loves me not; yet she is my beloved. [1]

are in themselves so ludicrous that (to paraphrase Pope's lines on vice) to be laughed to death, needed but to be read. The parodies merely provided the coup de grâce.

Progressing from the wit of words to the humour of situation, I feel that the stock situations of the Middle Ages, the trick and the counter-trick of the fabliau, the fable, and the picaresque tale, while infinitely less artistic than the clever plots of the Elizabethans, can scarcely be accounted more cruel. In fact, they seem to have been carried on in much the same manner. According to John [23] H. Bowden, "jest books were popular in early Tudor days, relating anecdotes which stimulated the middle class, made jokes on farmers, servants and tradesmen, were coarse to obscenity, and as unsympathetic as they were unsuitable to delicate ears."

Of the artistic productions, the first comedies, such as [24] Ralph Roister Doister and [25] Gammer Gurton's Needle also find their fun in tricks, in the confusion of the characters, and in their stupidity or cupidity. Delightful indeed is the passage where the boy tells of Hodge's attempt to light the fire from the cat's eyes:

> At last in a dark corner the sparkes he thought he sees
> Which were, indeed, nought else but Gyb our cat's two eyes.
> "Puffe," quod Hodge, thinking thereby to have fyre without doubt;
> With that Gyb shut her two eyes, and so the fyre was out.
> And by-and-by them opened, even as they were before;
> With that the sparkles appeared, even as they had done of yore.
> And even as Hodge blew the fyre, so he did thinke,
> Gib, she felt the blast, straightway began to winke.
> Tyll Hodge fell of swearing, as once best to his game.
> The fyre was fyne bright, and therfore mild not burne.
> At last Gyb up the staires, among the old pesten and pinnes,
> And Hodge he hied him after till broke were both his shinnes,
> Cursing and swearing either, were ashes of his enyme,
> That Gyb could fyre the house if that she were not taken. [26]

but it must be admitted that it is the superior, cerebral type of laughter that it arouses, when we laugh at the antics of a dullard and his subsequent discomfiture. Similar scenes must follow the [27] japes of putting Falstaff in the laundry-basket, or the scene where

Ariel, unseen, brings Stephano, Trinculo, and Caliban to harsh words and blows.[29]

Among the plays following the classical rather than the medieval models, we find *The Alchemist*[30] clinging to the conventional lines of successful morality which triumphs over dullness, although that dullness may be combined with civic worth. Volpone is infinitely more cruel than the Aesopian original. Today, many people are unable to grant *Volpone* the right to be called a comedy, when poor Celia has been made to suffer unmerited, harsh treatment. Today, too, we should question the plausibility of the trick played upon Corbin,[31] but the audiences of Beaumont and Fletcher seem to have enjoyed it as centrally as the readers of "Dame Kirkby" rejoiced in Wilkie's successful ruse which conquered Dame Margaret.[32]

There is, too, in 16th century humour of character a brittle quality, an insensitiveness, that makes the audience indifferent to the pain or embarrassment of any personage in the cast, as long as that pain or embarrassment appears amusing. The characters themselves have rounded out, and have acquired a greater resemblance to real people than they had in the middle ages. Hodge and Ralph and the dreamful Lady have all their counterparts in living Tudor England; they are no longer merely the butts of jokes, conditioned first to be knocked down by any passing joker. But we laugh at, not with them. Pleasing as we find Bosco, entertained as we are when he turns on his master, we are just as happy when he meets his deserts.[33]

Up to this point, I have been trying to avoid Shakespeare, but I cannot escape him.

In the first place, it must be admitted that Shakespeare was the child of his age. It is our constant horror that people of previous ages to our own found imbeciles and cripples funny because they were insane or deformed. Shakespeare must also have laughed at them. His delightful, tender-hearted Rosalind, who faints at the sight of her lover's blood, and who tries to dissuade a strange young man from wrestling with the redoubtable Charles, offering to save both his reputation and his ribs by interceding with the Duke for him, this Rosalind utters merrily a witty speech which rings with incredible cruelty in modern ears:

> Love is merely a madness, and I tell you, deserves as well a dark house and a whip as madmen do; and the reason why they are not so punished and cured is, that the lunacy is so ordinary — so

That Rosalind should accept placidly, or even callously, the whip and the dark house as curative measures we can condone; but those words "deserves" and "punishment" applied to madness scar the speech of our lovable Rosalind, of our sweet Shakespeare, removing them five centuries distant from our way of thinking in this one regard.

Portia, speaking of criminals, not of poor innocent lunatics, treats so wittily, although more gravely, a reference to the rack:

> Upon the rack, Shylock! Then confess
> What treason there is mingled with your love.
>
> ——
>
> Ay, but I fear you speak upon the rack
> Where men enforcèd do speak anything.

Mr. John Palmer has an interesting footnote on his opinion of Shakespeare's attitude to the "legally respectable institution" of torture. Yet I feel that Shakespeare accepted torture as Rosalind accepted whipping and the dark house; frequent as are his outbursts against tyranny, injustice, and foul play, I have never found impassioned plaints against

merited punishment, however cruel.

Cripples, Shakespeare regarded in a slightly different light. To both Shakespeare and Spenser, physical deformity was symbolic of spiritual degradation or depravity. If Caliban were only a misbegotten, misshapen, half-human creature, then Prospero's constant harshness

> Thou poisonous slave —
> For this, be sure, tonight thou shalt have cramps —
> ...
> If thou neglectest, or dost unwillingly
> What I command, I'll rack thee with old cramps;
> Fill all thy bones with aches —

would be insupportable. So, too, Spenser's filthy old hags might be objects of pity, if they did not typify vice and dishonour.

Similarly to Shakespeare, a bastard was almost inevitably a person of plots, dark souls, jealousies, betrayals. It is impossible to believe that in his life, Shakespeare would hold against a man the misfortune of illegitimacy; but in his art, he regarded it as a fixed symbol of wrong-doing.

All this, however, is on the negative side. If we admit that Shakespeare's feet walked upon the ground of the 16th century, we must also agree, with humble wonder, that his head moved in a realm of universals compounded of the truths of all ages, although saying so is but adding a mouse's squeak to the rich harmony of a great choir constantly augmented by the distinguished voices of each generation.

It is in the humour of Character that Shakespeare shows a sympathy, a humanity, that is captivating in any epoch, starting in his own. Unlike the other mediaeval humourists, who in greater or less measure despised the victims of their jokes, Chaucer poked a little happy fun at persons like the Prioress whom he evidently admired immensely. Shakespeare went

the additional mile. Few of his comic characters are unlovable. He taught English playgoers not only to laugh with, instead of at, them; but, more, to identify themselves with them. Shakespeare 39 himself wears their very skins. "Shakespeare," says Mr. Palmer, presenting a fool, is the fool incarnate; and,laughing at a fool, laughs at something which he requires us to recognise as flesh of our flesh and bone of our bone."

Of the confusingly large choice with which I am confronted when I go to select an example of Shakespeare's humanity in humour (and for brevity's sake, I must work only with an example), I am drawn magnetically to Benedict and Beatrice. They are so far above the old butts of comedy that we admire them as we laugh at them -- perhaps because to laugh at them. They present themselves willingly as targets for 40 the shafts of wit, but they are armed with the sharp arrows of their own banter; they are powerful adversaries in any comic combat. We laugh at and with them, and should be honoured to be identified in any way with them.

There is, however, much more to their humour than good nature and cleverness. They exemplify a humour that rises above the mere evocation of laughter, and presumes to find truth and the solution to universal problems, a solution which sadder eyes cannot see.

When Plutarch observed that it was within the realms of the liberal jest playfully to call good qualities by uncomplimentary terms 41 and thus bring out their excellence, he prophesied the dialogue of Benedict and Beatrice. Beatrice may not have realised who was complimenting Benedict's beard when she insulted it; but she was quick to declare that a youth who "hath no beard is less than a man." 42 And

Benedick the soldier, once his own idiom, "who speaks poniards and every word stabs."[45] Is he not offering a soldier's praise to a redoubtable opponent?

Their badinage, however, is something infinitely greater than the literal jest. They do not laugh at failings and deformities, contraventions of the conventional, but at the conventional itself, where it falls short of the ideal. Great champions of humour, they swing the swords of their mirth to cut into the complacency of a love like Claudio's that can come into being at the prospect of a spouse satisfactorily endowed physically and financially. This same humour, which cannot accept an easy love, will not accept an easy suspicion of evil where none exists. Benedick, who has no kind word for Beatrice because she is a duellist worthy of his metal, has only sympathy for the little "shrew" seemin fainting under a false accusation. Beatrice, who unwittingly forswears her love for Benedick, will not lie to protect Hero, because she is so convinced of Hero's innocence that she knows a lie will cloud the issue.

Where love is concerned, both Benedick and Beatrice have fixed their eyes on something above the ordinary and mundane:

Benedick: ---- but till all graces be in one woman, one woman shall not come in my grace ---- (Act II, scene iii.)

Beatrice: Not till God make men of some other metal than earth ---- (Act II, scene i).

They do not repudiate love because they believe it to be a frail and spotted thing, but because they believe it to be completely wonderful, while the manifestations they see around them are frail and spotted.

Their idealism has enabled them to perceive truth with their hearts when the eyes of their reason would be blinded by visible falsity.

FOOTNOTES TO CHAPTER VIII

1 Here I am paraphrasing the words of John M. Berdan. See Early Tudor Poetry, (Macmillan, New York)(1920) Chapter IV, page 220.

2 Richard Rolle, "The Form of Perfect Living," Minor Middle English Poems, ed. Cook, (Ginn & Co., Boston, etc) p. 267.

3 Shakespeare, Hamlet, Act II, sc. ii.

4 See Chapter VII, page 94, of this thesis.

5 On February 2, 1548, the Earl of Surrey and some companions, in what seems at best a drunken prank, raided London, breaking windows, and in other ways making nuisances of themselves. Caught in the act, Howard was committed to the Fleet; but he refused to take the punishment with a good grace. Instead, he wrote, "London, hast thou accused me," to justify his misconduct, on the grounds that the Londoners were united exploiters of prosperity and "lothsome vice", and that he was crusading against them in the name of justice. See Berdan, op. cit. p. 511 et. seq.

6 Henry Howard, "London, hast thou accused me?" Berdan, op. cit. p. 513.

7 See Chapter V, page 61 of this thesis.

8 Humfrey Gifford, "A Delectable Drama," Elizabethan Verse and Prose, ed. Potter p. 100.

9 Ibid, l. 68.

10 Ibid, lines 66-7, 66.

11 Sir Philip Sidney, "An Apologie for Poetrie," The Great Critics, ed. Smith and Parks, (W.W. Norton & Co., Inc., 1932)

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12 Max Bertram, The Enjoyment of Poetry. (Scottish Academic, London) p. 130.

13 See Introduction, page viii, para 1, of this thesis.

14 Shakespeare, "Love's Labour's Lost," Act IV, scene ii.

15 Miguel Cervantes, Don Quixote. (Dutton, New York, 1930) Part II, Chapter 66.

16 ——— op. cit.

17 Shakespeare, "Much Ado About Nothing," Act V, scene ii.

18 Thomas Delaney, "Jack of Newberie" Shorter Elizabethan and Jacobean Novels. W. Rhys, (Everyman, No. 856) p. 55 and p. 62. This, I must admit, is not verse; but as it was the most outrageous example that I found, I used it. Cf. also Dr. Caius, and the Welsh Squire in "The Merry Wives of Windsor."

19 Michael Drayton, "Nymphidia," Potter op. cit.

20 See In Kelly Pearson, Elizabethan Love Conventions. (University of California Press, 1933.)

21 Barnaby Barnes, "Parthenophil and Parthenophe." Potter, op. cit. p. 106.

22 Sixteenth century humour seems to have been expressed mostly in prose and plays, so I cannot adhere closely to my chosen field of non-dramatic verse.

23 Bardin, op. cit. p. 405 et seq.

24 Nicholas Udall, Ralph Roister Doister. (The Shakespeare Society, London, 1847.)

25 Wm. Stevenson, Gammer Gurton's Needle. (Macmillan, London, 1910.)

26 Ibid., Act I, scene v.

27 Shakespeare, "The Merry Wives of Windsor," Act III, sc. iii.

29 Shakespeare, "The Tempest", Act III, scene ii.

30 Ben Jonson, "The Alchemist." (King's Library, No In More Press, 1903.)

31 ..... "Volpone," and Introduction to Drama, ed. Mabell & Berry (Macmillan, N.Y.) Cf. Aesop, "The Fox and the Crow," "The Sick Lion," "The Lion, the Bear and the Fox."

32 Beaumont and Fletcher, "The Scornful Lady," (Dell & Duller, London, 1904.)

33 See Chapter VII, page 68, of this thesis.

34 Shakespeare, "As You Like It," Act III, scene ii. This, again, is prose; but I find my mind incapable of divorcing Shakespeare's prose and poetry in humor.

35 Shakespeare, "The Merchant of Venice," Act III, scene ii.

36 John Palmer, Comic Characters of Shakespeare, p. 68 (Macmillan & Co., 1946). (London)

37 Shakespeare, "The Tempest," Act I, scene 2.

38 E.g. The Faerie Queene, Book V, Canto ix, Stanzas 28 et seq.

39 Chaucer begins his description of the Prioress with a paradox, "That of hir smyling was ful symple and coy."

40 Palmer, Op. cit. Introduction, p. ix.

40. Shakespeare, "Much Ado about Nothing." In gallantly facing the ridicule which will break over him when he enrolls himself in love, Benedict is violating the classical principle that a wit must never direct the laughter at himself. (Chapter VI, pages 70 and 79, of this thesis) Would a Greek, I wonder, disavow his love rather than be laughed at?

41 Chapter VI, page 70, of this thesis.

42 Shakespeare, "Much Ado about Nothing," Act II sc. i.

43 Loc. cit.

CHAPTER IX

THE XVIIth CENTURY

It might be expected that the laughter of the Renaissance, so loud, spontaneous, and hearty it was, would echo for down succeeding centuries, reproducing itself in kind, if not in volume. But the wit of Donne played itself out with the Elizabethans, and the great, sympathetic, magnanimous humour of Shakespeare, which transcended all ordinary wit and comedy, like an unseasonably warm spell in March in Manitoba, left no reflected glow in the works of the comic poets who followed him. So I should like to proceed to the 18th century with only a few comments on the 17th and 19th in passing.

What was reflected in men's attitudes toward laughter in the 17th century was the sternness of the religious and political struggles. In his "Essay on Discourse", (1604) Sir Francis Bacon, as did the Greeks and Romans, laid down tenets for propriety in jesting. "As for jest," he said, "there are certain things exempt from it, namely, religion, matters of state, great persons, any man's present badness of importance, and any cause that deserveth pity." [1] These exemptions would certainly clip Humour's wings; and, if heeded, would have deprived us, among the multitude of examples that might be cited, of "The Land of Cokaigne", [2] the delightfully risible picture of the lazy sleeping shirkers, and the bulk of the humorous ballads. Nor could we of the 20th century see eye to eye with Sir Francis in the selection of causes deserving pity. Madmen were still shut in [3]

dungeons; servants were whipped for minor offences; slaves were treated as cattle; torture had not been abolished. Hobbes made no impassioned plea for pity of any creature victimized in any one of these ways.

Thomas Hobbes, too, debated the question of mirth.[4] "Great persons," he said pondorously, "have not the leisure to laugh." Blessed with their own power, he argued, great persons do not need any comparisons with the vices and infirmities of others to make them feel satisfied.[5] Wit, he felt, is "the elegant discovery and conveying to our minds of some absurdity of another", therefore our own eminency is disclosed and we recommend ourselves to good opinion by comparison with another man's infirmity or absurdity. Again, "Men laugh at mischance or indecencies wherein there lieth no wit nor never jest at all," and "no laugh at ourselves or our friends, except men laugh at their own past follies if they do not bring present dishonour."

If Hobbes had been right, then 17th century humour would indeed have been a shoddy, superfluous thing. He came to the conclusion that "laughter without offence must be at absurdities and infirmities abstracted from persons and when all the company may laugh together." To Hobbes, apparently, laughter was so idle and cruel that to be harmless, it would have to be pointless; that it was a sharp cutting sword with which men might fence only with shadows, lest a flesh-and-blood adversary receive a mortal wound.

The belief that laughter was either silly or sinful undoubtedly diminished the output of humorous poetry in the period; at least, no great volume has come down to delight following generations. The metaphysical poets erupted with some witty lines, of which many

could be called neither supercilious nor unsympathetic. John Donne gave the lie to Hobbes by presenting, in his rather irritable opening of "The Canonization", various of his own characteristics for ridicule. Abraham Cowley perhaps confirmed Hobbes' exception in his somewhat self-satisfied "Chronicle: A Ballad." (To feminine ears, although possibly only to mere feminine ears, the Chronicle seems less a listing of past follies than a recital of past triumphs.) Both Donne and Cowley in these poems, however, acknowledge themselves to be as human as their fellows, instead of pointing out failings of others that emphasize their own excellence. The Cavaliers tossed off verses as they flaunted their pretty manners, delicately and pleasingly; but neither the metaphysicals nor the cavaliers wrote anything uproariously funny that I have found.

Between the 16th and the 17th centuries, men lost the idea that words could be amusing plaything. Some poets engaged in the "purely cerebral sport" of writing emblem lines or of shaping verses in the form of urns, etc., but their efforts are interesting rather than amusing.

On a lower level, however, the political and other balladists wrote doggerel that we find hilarious, although most unkind. Their version of the Wit of Words; their use of broken, French-flavoured English and of dialect, especially of the brogue, express in a brutal manner, and in completely spurious words, their hatred of and contempt for the French and the Irish.

Milton, in his verse on the Oxford Carrier, indulged himself in a little playful bandying about with words. Yet, in this most harmless of all forms of mirth, a callous, if not a cruel, note crept in.

That swam to his last breath, (there he that say't)
As he were pressed to death, he cried, "More weight!"
(1. 23-6)

"As (if) he were pressed to death"! This gay reference is to a most inhuman custom. "Pressing to death," says the Universal Cyclopaedia, "(Peine forte et dure) was in England the punishment of those who refused to plead or abood mute upon their arraignment for felony. The victim was stretched naked on his back and had 'iron laid upon him as much as he could bear and more' and he was so kept and fed on bread and stagnant water (bread one day and water the next) until he yielded or died. The object of submitting to death by this penalty was not infrequently to avoid the forfeiture of lands consequent upon conviction for a felony. This punishment came into use about 1400 and was last employed in 1741 ---"

It is incredible that the high-minded Milton should jest about an inhuman custom which apparently victimized only those willing to martyr themselves for their families. Yet perhaps such a punishment seemed only just and not brutal to men of an age when, for the sake of religion, any faction rejoiced to see an enemy's ears clipped, and bodies were burned to save souls. There was still much of the medieval in both Puritan and Papist punishments.[10]

No, three hundred years and a war for religious freedom had not brought leniency or tolerance to Christian thought. When a man sought to widen the limits of sectarian bigotry, he attacked his enemies in a poem that was a s coarse and as cruel as it was ludicrous. Although Hudibras[11] is usually considered as an 18th century work, it is undoubtedly the greatest piece of comic poetry written during the 17th

century; it and it was of the 17th century, although it had to wait until after the Restoration to be published in full.

I have said that Hudibras is coarse, cruel, and ludicrous. To be sure, Butler made great capital of amusing rhyme and even more amusing images, but the wit of Hudibras in its harmlessness is a very small part of the work. As to the humour of situation, none of the action can be said to be sympathetic. To look at but one scene (and again brevity forces me to choose only one), that in which Hudibras is found in the stocks by the "tall long-eared dame, -- pelopod Fame": here Butler has given us an hilarious picture and exhilarating dialogue to sharpen a funny event; but the laughter evoked results from the enjoyment of the pain, embarrassment, and discomfiture of the principal character, (on the surface level), or of the chivalrous knight (on the secondary level), or of Presbyterianism (on the third).

Similarly, Hudibras and other personages in the poem have been vested with a wealth of failings and deformities, physical, mental, moral, and spiritual, at which the reader is invited to laugh.

Those who deplored or hated the excesses of the Presbyterians would justify Butler's threats and jabs in the name of that satire whose objective is amendment; but the fact remains that the justification is called for. Hudibras is, of course, a copy of Don Quixote; but its author has not tried to avoid slapping the face. Cervantes endowed his knight with a mournful dignity, a selfless idealism, and a lovableness, that lost nothing from being visible; Butler has made his laughing-stock nothing but a grotesque and rather disgusting figure of fun. Hudibras is the burlesque of a

burlesque; and kindness has been squeezed out.

Thus, the only conclusion I can draw from the 17th century's humorous poetry is that, in contrast to the giant's strides which man had made toward political freedom and religious tolerance, progress toward humanity in mirth was almost completely static. There was no Chaucerian, no Shakespearean sun, (certainly Milton shed no warm rays) to raise the temperature of this chilly period of English poetic humour.

NOTES TO CHAPTER II

1 Francis Bacon, "Essay on Discourse", quoted by W.A. Grant, Ancient Rhetorical Theories of the Laughable. (University of Wisconsin Studies in Language and Literature, No. 21) p. 8.

2 "The Land of Cokaigne", A Literary Middle English Reader, ed. Cook, (Ginn & Co., Boston, etc.) p. 307.

3 Edmund Spenser, "Mother Hubberd's Tale", Spenser's Minor Poems, ed. Selincourt, (Oxford Poets.) Part IV.

4 Thos. Hobbes, "The Answer to the Preface to Gondibert", Critics, Vol. IV. (John Bohn, London, 1851) Ch.IX, Sect. 15, p. 400.

5 Cf. Introduction, p. vii, of this thesis.

6 John Donne, "The Canonization," Seventeenth Century Poetry and Prose, ed. Coffin and Witherspoon, (Harcourt, Brace, New York).

7 Abraham Cowley, "The Chronicle; A Ballad." The Book of European Verse, compiled Carolyn Wells, (Garden City, New York) p. 176.

8 See The Percy Ballads, ed. Hyder Rollins, (Harvard University Press) An almost good-natured satirical ballad with Tongue as the butt of the joke is "Tongue and Sowney", or "The Unfortunate Success of a Dean-Joy's Devotion by St. Patrick's Cross." (1634) p. 94, Vol. VI. More derisive versions of both Irish and Scottish accents are attempted.

9 John Milton, "On the Oxford Carrier," Wells, op. cit. p. 700.

10 Cf. Chaucer's "povre Persoun of a Toun", who, although he was "to synful man nat despitous" (Prologue l. 516) and told of the man who was rebuked when he would beat his disciple "for his correction", (Pardoner's Tale, l. 675) says "If a person threl were taken in this synne, she sholde be beten with staves to the deeth; and if she were a gentil woman, she sholde be slayn with stones; and if she were a bishop's doghter, she sholde been brent, by Goddes comande ent." (lines 640-3).

11 Samuel Butler, Hudibras, Alsine M'n, (Geo Bell & Sons, Lo Don.).

12 Written considerably earlier, the first part of Hudibras was printed in 1662; the 2nd. part appeared in 1664; the last in 1678.

13 Butler, op. cit. Part II, Canto 1, lines 40-6.

CHAPTER X

THE XVIIIth CENTURY

"To Matt Prior and the 18th century in general," says Morris Bishop,[1] "the amorous misdemeanour was the one really funny thing on earth."

Mr. Bishop is wrong, I think. Wits of the 18th century were busy to make fun of anything or anybody. All the targets that had been set up to provoke laughter from the days of Aristophanes to the Reformation were again shot at in Neo-Classic England. The Church, the Government, and Marriage[2] were derided in heroic couplets, as they had been in the older forms of verse. Dryden, for example, gave us his satires, "MacFlecknoe"[3], and "Absalom and Architophel"[4] and the "Epitaph on his Wife."[5] Although Dryden described satire as "witty raillery", he also said, "The true end of satire is the amendment of vices by correction."[6] So, many of his satires are serious, not comic poems. So, too, many of his pleasant jibes may be lost in the gall that surrounds them. At times, he did not trouble to augment his pills; at others, the coating is so thin that only the venom is tasted.

Pope, on the other hand, made sure that his corrective potions should sparkle, and that their bitter taste should not pucker the smile away from his readers' lips. Even his literary enemies, subjects of his "Dunciad"[7]; even the stupider critics, attacked in his "Essay on Criticism"[8], must have paid grudging homage to his scintillating cleverness. As to his third principal subject for satire, women, (another favourite target for jest since the beginning of jesting), Pope clothed his criticism of them in such elegant

language, ornamented it with much erudition and so many tricks of humour, and planted his barbs so neatly and so subtly that women still find his poems charming.

Many more examples could be cited of humorous poetry directed against the same wide range of laughing-stocks, of which the amorous misdemeanour is but one. The 18th century has been called the age of great English satire, and it cannot be denied that the bulk of this satire was biting and bitter, whether or not its purpose was amendment. Must I say, then, that kindness was non-existent, and that the humane temperature of comic poetry fell sharply during the 1700's?

On the affirmative side, it must be confessed that many of the satires of the 18th century were written expressly to inflict pain or embarrassment, or to point out and laugh at pain and embarrassment already existing. Certainly, comic poets laughed at the butts of their jokes rather than with them; equally certainly, they laughed at real persons, and not at the abstractions of imperfections. Nor did they necessarily satirize because the laughing-stock fell short of the ideal, but usually because he caused them inconvenience, or held opposing views from their own.

Admittedly, too, the satirists were self-satisfied, and laughed in a smarting way from the height of their self-acknowledged superiority. And they took pleasure in belittling their opponents, in painting people in blackest colours, and in crying down the human race as a very unworthy type of animal.

Progress had been made towards greater political freedom and religious tolerance, it is true; but men still battled for their opinions to the last drop of ink. "He who draws pen for one party,"

said Dryden, [10] "must expect to make enemies of the other. For -- every man is a knave or an ass to the contrary side." Black was very black, and white was very white. A man could never believe his opponent could be a lovable human being; it could never occur to him that his opponent could be in part right. Tolerance of the other person's opinions, or even of the other person, had yet to be developed. There were no Marquis of Queensbury rules in the literary ring.

Yet, while these chilly winds of satiric quarrels were lowering the temperature of humorous poetry, the sun was shining in several spots, providing warmth, and promising a geniality that was to come. Lest I should seem to lose myself running through the woods and looking at all the trees to find these sunny spots, I shall confine my forestry to two clearings. First I shall try to examine some satirical motives; then I shall try to point out some comic material that does not conform to the action of the age.

I cannot feel that Dr. Swift's attacks on the "young nymphs" [11] of fashion were written as much from an honest desire to correct their vanity and filth, as from an eager craving to expose them. On the other hand, I have spoken of Swift's "incredibly cruel" [12] work, "A Modest Proposal." A sensitive person can not read this without shuddering; yet here, in this epitome of all cruelty, can be found a humanity, a kindness, that is altruistic and original, born of a century when men were perhaps beginning to see each other with clearer eyes.

If the revolting "Proposal" had been offered merely for

entertainment, merely for its laughter value, as it is often suggested of its Aristophanic original, then its barbarism would be insupportable. But it was inspired, not by mirth, but by sympathy; by sorrow for the fate of a starving people, by hatred of social conditions that allowed them to starve; perhaps also by indignation at their shiftlessness. The mask, then, is not artistic devices; it is a masculine weapon. It is indeed a cutting sword which, because it drew blood from individuals, separated itself from the liberal jest, possibly from jesting in general, and offered itself to the cause of humanity. Rabelais,[13] too, had need the weapon of his wit in the cause of beating children, but only in passing. Swift made an important personal combat of his disapproval.

His rage, it will be noticed, was not aroused on his own account. By motivation, his piece is an infinitely kinder thing than Gay's Fables,[14] which gratified a personal grudge against the Court; or than Pope's Dunciad,[15] which was written, at best, in self-defence; or than Dryden's satires, political or religious, which attacked the enemies of Dryden's own party or creed. It is the method, not the motive, that is brutal. Swift is a stern schoolmaster flogging his boys; a surgeon hacking away at a cancer, using an anaesthetic and an instead of a scalpel. If, however, this method succeeded in awakening the race to a realization of human suffering, then surely it is justified; surely, in the final analysis, it is kind.

I cannot argue, of course, that this literary altruism was original with Swift, or new in the 18th century; but hitherto, while individual tyrants or oppressors had been lampooned, indignation against social conditions was expressed in tragedy, in such lines as

— Who would fardels bear
To grunt and sweat under a weary life — 20

or in thundering trochaics.

In my second clearing, as a second indication of kindness in the 18th century, it must be noted that not all the humorous poets wielded cutting swords. On the subject of women, where Pope[19] was sharp and Swift was scurrilous, Sheridan, in "A Literary Lady", was gently teasing; and in his epigram on "A Wife", [18] (in an age when it was stylish to ridicule wives and marriage) he neatly turns the tables in favour of the (literately) weaker sex. But Sheridan may be said to be courtly rather than kindly.

Of Goldsmith,[19] greatest of satirists, however, it can never be said that he was anything but humane. He took (and gave) pleasure in the harmless practice of punning; in the amiable silliness of reported trials. Gifford had veiled his satire on women in the obvious,[20] as Goldsmith frolics whimsically with words in "Retaliation"; he also softens some very pointed criticism in his famous verse on Mrs. Mary Blaize,[21] and in his even more famous "Elegy on the Death of a Mad Dog."[22] Animals in humorous poetry are as old as Aesop, but have never carried a poet's wit better than in the lines,

The dog, to gain some private ends,
Went mad, and bit the man, (lines 19-20)

and

And swore the dog had lost his wits. (line 32)

This use of human terminology when the dog is kept strictly a dog may be satiric as well as comic, but it can cause no wounds; and I, for one, find it most amusing. (The italics are mine.)

The heyday of both Sheridan and Goldsmith, to be sure, came considerably later than that of Dryden, Swift, and Pope. It would seem as if half way through the century, the verve of the earlier poets had been consumed; or had, by its own intensity, distilled within its own depths an antidote. Certainly, an amiability appeared in the later humorous poetry. To revert to my basic metaphor, I may say that by 1700 or so, a vocal spring was manifesting itself; the mercury had climbed to an unprecedented height, from which it has never descended.

In one poem, especially, written before the end of the century, there can be seen a marked advance in sympathy. When William Cowper wrote about John Gilpin,[24] he chose a situation that should bring out all the most unkind instincts of laughter in his readers. A very ordinary sort of man, a linendraper bold, is made a fool of by his horse, is chaffed out of his mild little celebration, and suffers considerable discomfort. The story is told wittily, hilariously. But another (perhaps an earlier) poet would have made Gilpin a crabbed or a foolish creature: someone in authority whose downfall we should find gratifying, or someone in low life whom we should sneer at anyway; or some sinner whose misdemeanours would bring a punishment which we ourselves should never, never be likely to incur. Then we should follow the incident with a superior delight, as we chuckled when Hodge was baffled by the ant,[25] or when Falstaff was carried off in the laundry-basket.[26] Gilpin, however, is as smart as we are:

> How Gilpin had a pleasant wit, and loved a timely joke. (l. 25)

What is more, he enjoys the joke as much as we do. It may be that we

laugh at rather them with him, but that does not deprive him of the fun. Indeed, he laughs with us; more, he adds his quota to our mirth, quipping,

> I came because your horse would come; and if I well forebode,
> My hat and wig will soon be here, they are upon the road.
> (lines 37-8)

Unlike Benedict, he does not offer himself valiantly to ridicule; but when it is thrust upon him, he accepts it gracefully and mirthfully; and we are all the better because of his good sportsmanship.

FOOTNOTES TO CHAPTER X

1 Morris Bishop, A Treasury of British Humor, (Coward-McCann, Inc., New York) p. 34.

2 See Chapter IV, page 65, of this thesis.

3 John Dryden, "Reflections, or A Review upon the Two-Mile Protestant Poet", 16th Century Poetry and Prose, ed. Bredvold, etc., (The Ronald Press Co., New York)

4 ——"Absalom and Architophel" Bredvold, op. cit.

5 —— "Epitaph Intended for his Wife," The Book of Famous Verse, compiled Carolyn Wells, (Garden City, New York) p. 300.

6 —— Introduction to "Absalom and Architophel", Bredvold, op.cit.

7 Alexander Pope, "The Rape of the Lock," Poems, (American Publishers Corporation, New York)

8 —— "Essay on Criticism," Poems, op. cit.

9 See Chapter V, pages 61 and 70 of this thesis.

10 John Dryden, Introduction to "Absalom and Architophel," op. cit.
11 E.E. J. Smith, "A Beautiful Young Nymph Going to Bed", see p. 50.
12 See Chapter V, page 67, of this thesis. Again, I must confess to using a work of prose instead of poetry; but "A Modest Proposal" is by far the most outstanding example of what I want to point out: cruelty of method and benignity of purpose; kind cruelty, one might say.

13 F. Rabelais, Pantagruel (Lorenzo, Paris) Bk. IV, Ch. xlvii.

14 John Gay, Fables.

15 Pope, "The Rape of the Lock," op. cit.

16 Shakespeare, "Hamlet", Act III, sc. i.

17 A.B. Sheridan, "The Literary Lady," Wells, op. cit. pp 270.

18 R.B. Sheridan, "A Wife," Wells, Op. cit. p. 566.

19 In speaking of Goldsmith, I am tempted to wander from my subject of American poetry and mention the gems of wit found in "She Stoops to Conquer." I have resisted the temptation.

20 H. Gifford, "A Dream", see Chapter VIII, page 90.

21 O. Goldsmith, "Weaven Grey," Wells, Op. cit. p. 741

22 ——— "An Elegy, On the Glory of her Sex, Mrs. Mary Blaize," Wells, Op. cit. p. 740

23 ——— "An Elegy on the Death of a Mad Dog." Wells, Op. cit. p. 764.

24 William Cooper, "The Diverting History of John Gilpin," Wells, Op. cit. p. 864.

25 See Chapter VIII, page 90. Wm. Stevenson, Summer Customs "andle

26 See Chapter VIII, page 90. Shakespeare, 1 & Henry Fives of Richard, Act III, scene iii.

CHAPTER II

THE XIXth CENTURY

Most people, if questioned on the subject, would be quick to advance an opinion that the humorous poetry of the 19th century shows a vast increase in kindliness over that of the 18th. As proof, they might immediately mention the jovial geniality of W.S. Gilbert, or the scarcely bookishness of Austin Dobson. Women, especially, might point out the strong contrast in the treatment of the Lady of Fashion. Congreve was stinging in his portrait of the decayed beauty, Lady Wishfort;[1] Pope's barbs penetrated deeply when he discussed "characters";[2] on the contrary, in such a poem as Kipling's "My Rival",[3] the aging queen is shown in a very favourable light and there is something very touching as well as comical in the young maiden's envy. Kipling's gallantry, however, like Gilbert's geniality, or Dobson's bookishness, may be only peculiar to the man. One may of course does not make a summer.

Others, deeper thinkers, will introduce the Emancipation movement[4] and will claim that a generation, conscious of the ills of mankind, that abolished slavery "at a cost of twenty million pounds cheerfully paid by the British taxpayer",[5] that caused the passing of the Reform Bills and the Factory Acts (to mention only three manifestations), would naturally produce a more sympathetic poetry, humorous or otherwise. This claim I believe to be valid.

Whatever the cause, however, there was, in my opinion, a noticeable increase of warmth during the 19th century and the latter

part of the 18th. To my mind, two elements were present in the literary ferment that brought about a rise in the mercury of the humorous thermometer. The first was the descent of the poet to sit with the common people, to write in the language of the common people, to laugh tolerantly or woefully at the absurdities found in himself and in the men most intimately associated with him; to become one with and of the common people. The second element was formance.

Each literary period bears within itself the sperm of its own destruction, and the seeds of the literary period which is to supersede it. So Burns, whose life-span was wholly within the limits of the 18th century, was perhaps the greatest exponent of the first element, homeliness in verse, although another preacher of the doctrine had preceded him by seventy-five years. When Allan Ramsay wrote "Maty's Answer" in 1718, he exploited the eminence for which his nation is both famous and notorious; and he used the Scots tongue. In so doing, he neither separated himself from his race and soared from a superior height; nor did he, like a clown, invite laughter by cutting undignified capers.

Previously, it seems to me, the wit of Scots had seized upon dialect as an excellent medium for mirth; but the dialect was always that of the other man, never the mother-tongue of the poet himself; it was in the mouth of the gull that it was funniest. When Chaucer put north-country phrases into the speeches of the two young clerks, when Shakespeare mimicked the Welsh in the blending, spitting dialogue of Sir Hugh Evans, when the balladists produced uncouth and unreconstructed

nimble French and Irish accents, the ensuing merriment was superior. That was laughed at was invariably in the third person; now with Burns it is in the first. "We talk thus; we are canny; we are funny; come and laugh with us."

No one could call Burns an entirely kind poet. When he rises to defend himself or his kind, when he attacks snobbery, bigotry, or any other evil, he is as savage and as cruel as an untamed animal. He fights with tooth and claw and all the ferocity of an outraged creature plus all the skill of a trained wrestler. "Holy Willie's Prayer" [10] is as nasty a bit of vituperation as can be found in any generation, and not necessarily just. In it Burns can be accused of attacking not an enemy of mankind, not a universal wrong-doer, but a person who has undertaken to mend Nature's own far from perfect ways. Yet Burns' exquisite tenderness, his kindly tolerance, his warm sympathy, manifest themselves as surely in his comic poetry as in his lovely songs. He has indeed sat on the inn bench with the erring Tam O'Shanter, and when he cries humorously but ruefully,

> Ah, Tam! ah, Tam! thou'll get thy fairin',
> In hell they'll roast thee like a herrin', [11]

he can be considered to be meditating on his own future as well as Tam's.

This masterpiece of Burns' is a perfect example of the use of native characterization and dialect for humorous purposes. The poet is known for his fondness of whisky, his convivial spirit, and his wholesome awe of the devil and his minions; the hostess wife is equally renowned for her scornful strictness and her stern warnings. Tam and Kate are well within the tradition; and Burns and his readers chuckle over the inclusion of each homely detail in the same way that the ironies

of the inglenook increase their brotherliness with each swallow:

Tam lo'ed him like a very brither,
They had been fou' for weeks thegither. (lines 43-4)

The use of dialect is as intimate as a nudge in the ribs; the pictured shown are cut right out of life.

The landlady and Tam grew gracious. (line 47)

So, too, when Burns retells the old story how the mighty are brought low, he uses images within the orbit of his own people:

Nag was dear as Allan Craig (line 11)

Spak o' lowpin' o'er a linn (l. 15)

How they've crouse and canty baith. (l. 50)

What Robert Burns did in humorous poetry with the Scottish people, customs, and tongue, Samuel Lover did later with the Irish. To be sure, Lover did not compose his verses at the plough-tail, but he was Irish by birth, feeling, and tongue; and whether or not his songs are written in the third person, they all have the "we" attitude. Like Burns, he exploited his national characteristics to the full. Whether the protagonist of the piece is a rascal (an engaging rascal, like Paddy O'Rafferty, that goes without saying), or an humble, honest lover like sweet Mary's admirer, he is as Irish as Lover's own face.

One of the outstanding traits in Irish character is a simple faith in the impossible, as one of the most notable things in the Irish tongue is its inability to speak plainly. Both of these elements are ludicrous; both are excellent material for comedy, the type of comedy that bottoms on the silliness of others. Lover, however, and the other Irish poets (such as Lady Dufferin, Charles Jeffries, Sir Thomas Moore) who have made capital of their countrymen, have succeeded in evoking laughter that is not caricature, but affectionate

and a little admiring. Who could be stupider than Katy, writing to a lover who cannot read, and refusing to write his name outside,

> For I would not have that postmaster
> Make his remarks upon it,
> As I sold inside the letter
> That I love him faithfully.

yet, thanks to the skill and charm of humorous poets such as Lady Duffering and Lover, readers do not scorn Katy; they call her quaint, and look upon her quaintness with that parental amusement that people show toward children.

Again, it seems to me that it was in the 19th century that the great possibilities of children as subjects for humour were first recognized. Previously, children had been only small adults or machinery to make more poignant a tragic scene. What fun Shandy would have had with a mediaeval Tom Sawyer, but the only mention of a child that comes to mind is the infant-martyr in the Prioress's Tale. To Shakespeare, too, children were "poor birds". In the 19th century, however, children came out of the nursery, and while they were the victims of sentimentalists who wrote sicky narratives about bowdlerized who were inevitably crippled, they also entered into humorous poetry.

Humour involving children is by its very nature kind; when it is cruel, it is whimsically so. When 19th century audiences rocked with mirth over Mrs. Malaprop's linguistic blunders, they felt defensive of Mrs. Malaprop, but when a mother reports her child's slaughter

> For I come from Alabama
> With a bandaid on my knee,

she is beaming with pride as well as amusement, pride that her child

has been able to adapt the newly known to its little store of knowledge. The child unconsciously, or perhaps instinctively, contributes to the wit of words, and thus to the development of the language.

In the 19th century, much of the humorous poetry involving children was didactic, comically listing the dreadful things that happened to young things who banged doors, neglected to wash, or disobeyed their elders. Other verses gave penetrating character analyses. The first person pieces spoken by the little boy blackmailers of big sister's beau were accurate studies of the child mind, none better than James Whitcomb Riley's "Prior to Mis Kello's Appearance",[19] with its naivety, its wandering interest, and the constant appeals for confirmation from the older brother. Still others expressed a serious thought in a flippant manner, as Coleridge's

> Ah! Cease thy tears and sobs, my little life!
> I did but snatch away the unsheathed knife;
> Soon safer toy will soon arrest thine eye,
> And to quick laughter change this peevish cry!

Verse on the surface cruel, such as Bowman's

> Wonder, behold! This monster wild
> Has gobbled up the infant child.
> The infant child is not aware
> It has been eaten by a bear.

being completely out of the experience of the ordinary reader, becomes fantastic, and its cruelty is mitigated by its unreality.

Though children were the second element which contributed to the increase of kindness in the 19th century; nonsense. It may be argued that all light verse is nonsense, but I am using the word in its literal meaning: verse that quite openly and honestly means nothing at all.

says Angus Davidson, [28] "There had been published about 1830 by the house of Marshall, well known for its editions of books for children, a small pamphlet of verses, gaily illustrated with coloured woodcuts --- called Anecdotes and Adventures of Fifteen Gentlemen: two other small books in the same series related the adventures of Fifteen Young Ladies and of Fifteen Wonderful Old Women." These were perhaps the first known limericks. One of them,

There was an old man of Tobago,
Lived long on rice gruel and sago:
But at last, to his bliss,
His physician said this --
To a roast leg of mutton you may go.

was shown to Edward Lear, "in days when much of my time was passed in [29] a country house where children and mirth abounded." This inspired his first Book of Nonsense. Verses (with illustrations) such as,

There was an old Man who said, "Hush!
I perceive a young bird in this bush!"
When they said, "Is it small?"
He replied, "Not at all!
It is four times as big as the bush!"

[30] clipped off his pen, "no countenance having been given me in any way but that of spontaneous delight at the appearance of every new absurdity." The book was highly successful, and many weighty opinions were offered on the meaning of the limericks: that they were political, satirical, or otherwise significant. These opinions Lear refuted. "'More sure', he tells us, 'than might be supposed has been given to make the subjects incapable of misinterpretation: "Nonsense", pure and absolute [31] having been my aim throughout.'"

It is true that the epic "Owl and the Pussy-cat" tells a coherent story, and the pictures painted, even that of an owl dancing with a pig

and a cat, bear some relation to possibility. Much of the Loop verse, however, is sheer imaginative flight. What is a Song with a luminous sense but an attractive fancy? What kind of plot is in "The Jubilee"? What is the "Fellem Chorus" but pure poetry, with precision of rhythm, a carefully selected agglomeration of lilting words, many of them coined, and a kaleidoscope of exquisite colours? All these, in delighting the senses and puzzling the brain, open up a vista of something that is neither sensuous nor intellectual, something beyond both sense and brain.

Some time later, Lewis Carroll spread his wings in similar flight, and soared even higher into nothingness. Where Loos was nonsensical and silly, Carroll was so subtly meaningless that he appears to be expressing something mystical in a language comprehensible only through the visibility. "Only one man could almost express the inexpressible," says G.H. Stern, "that king of alternate mathematics and inconsequence, Lewis Carroll."[20] Perhaps with his mathematician's constant contemplation of infinity through arithmetic progressions, his mathematician's use of the infinite, he was able to see beyond the range of ordinary mortals, and visualize a truth that was not one of reason or logic, but one of instinct.

Her truth, it has been discovered, is not a mere matter of statement of fact. R.L. Stevenson flatly contradicted Hume's identification of fiction and falsehood[20] when he said, "The smallest lies are often told in silence. A man may have sat in a room for hours and not opened his teeth, and yet come out of that room a disloyal friend or a vile calumniator -- a lie may be told by a truth, or a truth conveyed

through a lie. Truth to facts is not always truth to sentiment; and part of the truth, as often happens in answer to a question, may be the foulest calumny. A fact may be an exception; but the feeling is the law, and it is that which you must neither garble nor belie."[30]

Like Lear, Lewis Carroll was suspected of all kinds of meanings. Like Lear, he denied any subtlety. Referring to the fourth Walter de la Mare quotes, "'I am very much afraid,' said Dodgson,'I didn't mean anything but nonsense — but since words mean more than we mean to express when we use them — whatever good meanings are in the book I am very glad to accept as the meaning of the book' — a remark which is not only modest and generous but well worth pondering."[31]

There is no disputing that the age which followed the discovery of electricity, which saw the invention of the turbine, and which enjoyed the first operation of the steam railway, was one of utilitarianism. Naturally, literature was affected. Various critics passionately believed and vehemently argued that poetry should be of definite utility: for the teaching of precepts, for moral uplift, for patriotic stimulation, for social reform. If 'Art for Art's Sake movement was a revolt against this utilitarianism, so too was Nonsense, which is laughter for laughter's sake, and an escape from the grimly practical. Or, perhaps, "since words mean more than we mean to express when we use them", it is a step into the unknown. Or, again, perhaps it is a way of looking at the infinite and finding the worldly of little account. The incomparable, ever-delightful "Jabberwocky"[32] may be nothing — or it may be everything. Edward Lear once wrote a letter to Lord Cromer which reduces all correspondence, business, social, or diplomatic, to

rubbish:

Thripsy Pillivinx,

Inky tinky pobblebockle ablo-equabo? Flonky! Boobal trubble Flonky! Oimi sosatch abibblebongibo, viddle squibble tog-e-bog, ferry noyeno-ity snaky flenaky dendy crocklefother squigge.

Flinky winty porn,

Chuckypigg. 33

Many a love letter has been less sensible; many a military despatch has been less comprehensible. Yet is it satire? I am of the opinion of Walter de la Mare 34 that "Satire and parody in themselves are mortal enemies of true Romance."

Having mentioned Parody, I cannot leave any discussion of 19th century humorous poetry without a few words on what came to be a fine art at that time. If the proverb that Imitation is the sincerest flattery is to be trusted, then each parody is a compliment; but parody fundamentally is criticism, so each piece may either admire or deplore. It is a ticklish point to try to decide whether harsh criticism is more brutal in verse than in prose; certainly it is sharper; it reaches the brain more quickly, and remains in the memory a longer time. Consider, for example,

> Two voices are there; one is of the deep;
> It learns the storm-cloud's thunderous melody,
> Now roars, now murmurs with the changing sea,
> Now bird-like pipes, now closes soft in sleep:
> And one is of an old half-witted sheep
> Which bleats articulate monotony,
> And indicates that two and one are three,
> That grass is green, lakes damp, and mountains steep:
> And, Wordsworth, both are thine: at certain times
> Forth from the heart of thy melodious rhymes,
> The form and pressure of high thoughts will burst:
> At other times — good Lord! I'd rather be
> Quite unacquainted with the A B C
> Than write such hopeless rubbish as thy worst. 35

Here, I think, expressing an excellent piece of criticism in parody and in verse is much kinder than putting it in prose. Had it appeared in the ordinary paragraph of the literary supplement, no one would remember anything but the "old half-witted sheep" (and Heaven forbid that such an exquisite, wicked, bon mot be suppressed), whereas the sonnet, pouring forth in Wordsworthian grandeur, fills the reader again with a realisation of the beauty and majesty of Wordsworth's best poetry.

Romanticism itself can be parodied. In 1944, a combat report of a R.A.F. intruder squadron once back really startled by the teletype (not a rare occurrence, unfortunately). The crew of one fighter aircraft believed that considerable damage had been inflicted on a Focke Wolfe, as it plummeted down at the own airfield and the gunner noticed that when it hit the ground it skipped and glided about. Immediately, a bright spirit, passing (as he himself said) through the nearest looking-glass, came back with this:

"I was brillig and the Jaw
Had slip and slaive upon the sunset,
"O frabjous day," th'observer cried,
"We've pranged the bogeyes more than seventy."

NOTES TO CHAPTER XI

1 Wm. Congreve, The Way of the World, Twelve Famous Plays. (Modern Library.)

2 Alexander Pope, "Moral Essays", Poems. (American Publishers Corporation, London), Epistle II, "To A Lady."

3 R. Kipling, "My Rival", A Treasury of British Humor. ed. L. Untermeyer, (Coward-McCann, Inc., New York) p. 370.

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9 Cf. Chapter X, page 110, of this thesis.

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11 ——— "Tam O'Shanter", Bretwld op. cit.

12 ———"Auteon Grey", Bretwld op. cit.

13 Samuel Lover, "Paddy O'Rafferty", Lover's Songs of

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15 Lady Dufferin, "Katy's Letter" Famous Poems. (World Syndicate.)

16 Mark Twain, The Famous.

17 Shakespeare, "Macbeth", Act IV, scene ii.

18 See, e.g. Chapter III, page 37, of this thesis.

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22 Angus Davidson, Edward Lear, (Penguin # 787) p. 87.

23 Ibid p. 89

24 Ibid p. 89

25 E. Lear, A Book of Love, ed. R.L. Megroz (Penguin 1170) p. 69.

26 Davidson, op. cit. p. 90.

27 loc. cit.

28 G.K. Chesterton, Robert Louis Stevenson, (The Macmillan Co., New York, 1949) p. 26.

29 See Introduction, page vii, of this thesis.

30 R.L. Stevenson, Virginibus Puerisque. (Chatto & Windus)

31 Walter de la Mare, "Lewis Carroll", The Nightmare-Numbles. (Cambridge University Press) p. 247.

32 Lewis Carroll, "Nobbercocky", Works (Modern Library).

33 E. Lear,"A Letter to Lord Cromer" Bishop, op. cit. p. 170.

34 de la Mare, op. cit. p. 238.

35 J.K. Stephens, "Wordsworth", quoted by Mrs. H. Richardson, in Envoy. (The English Association, Pamphlet No. 98) p. 7.

CHAPTER XI

The 20th Century

"I am a part," said Ulysses, "of all that I have met."[1] So each century, like a snowball, begins with what has been painfully stated, together with the crusts accumulated over the years, lays off that which will not adhere, adds something of the material through which it rolls, sometimes indeed picks up what has been discarded by a previous generation. In search of elegance and sweetness, the 18th century poets denied the worth of those of the 17th century; seeking to express their doubts and tensions, poets of the 20th century have gone back to Donne and Cowley, as if discovering them for the first time.

This final chapter of my thesis, then, will examine the snowball; or, to change the metaphor, will attempt to build its argument on all the foundations painfully laid down, and against all the structures laboriously set up.

Men still write humorous poetry to entertain, to instruct, to amend, and to discredit. Nowhere today, however, can we find invective as wicked as Nippenan's. Should it be pointed out that the Abel Lens, and not the poets' own gentlemen, are responsible for this quotation, I stoutly affirm that the Abel Lens themselves are an evidence of a growing kindness that will not allow one man to fling another's feelings, any more than he can assault his body. In general, I can not say that satire is my concern. When I compare T.S. Eliot's description of the society lady in "The Wasteland", to

Pope's in "The Rape of the Lock", 5 I must say I find Pope's less 120 uncomfortable.

We have no entire to equal Swift's in virulence. To be sure, we are softer today than were our forefathers. No surgeon attempts to excise a cancer with an axe; there may be an analogy between the gentler entire and today's widespread use of anaesthetic. Many a dentist insists on using novocaine for the painful fillings of even his most valiant patients, so much to save his own sensibilities as theirs. This is sympathy — or softness — as you will. Satire can well be painless to both reader and writer if it is administered with an analgesic or with a counterirritant. "Native Cheer", to my mind, 6 is a benevolent attack on the over-romantic; "And/Or", on bureaucracy.

We are softer, too, or wiser, in our pedagogy. Our teaching methods are not the rigorous flog-and-frighten procedure that prevailed even fifty years ago. So there is a dearth of didactic poems, cutting in their severity. This is a soul-searching age; psychology is a leading science, and the eyes of most literary men are turned inward. Instead of attempting to teach their fellows the difference between right and wrong, many men write candidly of circumstances, failings and deformities, more from an intellectual desire to expose them artistically. 7 But is there much evidence of the hope of amendment. Such poetry, the accusation may run, is less an expression of kindness than a literary slap of the shoulders. Grousing is often ordained as Victorian.

To my mind, again, there is a new aesthetic purpose in the writing of some humorous verse, which can be called neighbor pedagogy, not satire, but which, intentionally or subconsciously, is sympathetic in the highest degree. It is the use of laughter to demonstrate action, to bring home

This is a new thing, yet it has long roots. It does not spring from the old, continental laughter-and-dance technique, so capably employed, for example, by Clément Marot, who wrote wittily of his sad plight, his tear-stained eyes fixed steadily on the King's purse. Nor is it fathered by Saint's thundering denunciation, which is unmistakably entire. One antecedent is Rabelais' reference to child-beating; another is Molière's treatment of such comic-sordo characters as Alceste, although in Le Misanthrope, we laugh not so much at Alceste's attempts at reform as at his inconsistencies and his mistaken methods. George Bernard Shaw, in "Mrs Warren's Profession", has made us laugh at what we pity and deplore. And Molière and Shaw written their plays seriously as Social Comedies, blasts against the corruption of Louis's court, or 19th century conditions where a poor girl observed virtuous and succeeded otherwise, they would have aroused proper indignation and dint with their day. So it is, they are still great plays aesthetically, and still plant in our minds (in the midst of our laughter) an indignation against a universal corruption or a universal favouring of moral turpitude. Hardy did the same thing in his wryly humorous poem about his ruined maid.

About all these evil things that were shown up visibly, however, something could be done. People can stop beating their children, corruption can be cleaned up, and social conditions improved. Hardy wrote other wry poems for which there is no solution. A man can be made to go to church, but he cannot be made to believe in a loving God. A woman can be kept from deceiving her husband, but she cannot be prevented from loving some one else.

Admirers of the poetry of Dorothy Parker will find this same pathos behind the bitter flippancy. By the use of a word here, a phrase there, e.g.

> My soul is sick for Italy — 15
> Hell and bitterly I know — 16
> Love —
> Lead in the night as a clock that ticks; 17

she exposes herself to the penetrating eye, to prove that a heart can beat beneath a mink coat, as poignantly as under the traditional gingham gown.

W.H. Auden acknowledges Hardy as his spiritual father. Certainly, in the branch of wry humour, the paternity is confirmed. "Victor was a Little Baby" [18] is as pointed and pessimistic an indictment of social conditions as Hardy ever wrote. In his story about Miss Gee, [19] Mr. Auden has outstripped his progenitor. On the surface, this is a rollicking rhyme about an unattractive old maid; the reader can laugh unfeelingly in all superiority. On a deeper (or higher) level, however, it is a compassionate exposition of a loveless figure, all the more poignant because she is unlovable. The superficial reader (no, everybody, because they are funny) will guffaw at the line, "And she had no bust at all," and at her highly significant dreams; but how frustration is pitiful. The doctor summarizes this pathos:

> It's like some hidden economic
> Waiting to strike at you (stanza 13)
> —
> It's as if there had to be some outlet
> For their foiled creative fire. (stanza 10)

Here is no tragic heroine who has encountered a cruel fate or made a dreadful mistake, who inspires us with admiration and wrings our

hearts with pity. Here is no figure of oppression in adverse social conditions. Here is a funny little thing suffering as do all her kind that is what makes her so sad. Mr. Auden does not ask us to subscribe to the Cancer Fund, now to form a society to Make Lovely Unlovely pictures. All he asks is for our laughter — and our tears.

Something of the same kind was done by Lieut. Col. Darrell Bethune, [20] when he wrote "A Korean Christmas Carol." All the fun in the verse is not in spite of the horrors it is because of the horrors it illuminates the horror like a flare. The tears in our eyes are not those of immoderate laughter. And the method of making us pity by laughing is a terrible one. It is like being tickled to death.

In the wit of words we have made an advance. The use of dialect, mispronunciation, etc. has risen to a more subtle height. With the best writers, it will no longer be a case that

Dear Professor give a party
Say had blues playing, [21]

but that the learned wife should be a good listener to the story and because she had a piano that could be played and likes entertaining the neighbours with beer and eight party-giving Hans Breitmann, etc. We laugh, not only because the conglomeration of words separating the article and the noun is ludicrous in English, but because we erudite German students know that a thundering polysyllabic word or phrase will cover the case very neatly in German. The source of our pleasure is not so much superiority to the stupid Germans who talk that way, but the purely mental recognition of a difficulty overcome. Dr. Hebert is not too [22] unkind to Sarah Binks because he lets us add to her fame from all our own memories of such delights as, "Peterkin walked out of the elevator

into his new suit."[85]

Today, the old comic situations may be exploited in humorous verses; but not from the smug attitude that this could not happen to me. Ogden Nash's difficulties with the water in his cottage are all our difficulties, and

> ... the other most beautiful sight I saw during the summer was the day the water wouldn't run at all and in came the plumber.[86]

is also a beautiful sight to all of us. Similarly, our comic characters need no longer be stupid dolts, or clever people doing stupid things. They may be ourselves, hampered by our faults and committing our blunders.[87] Or they may be, like Hamlet, people we should be proud to be.[88]

As well as the wit of words and the humours of situation and of character, there has sprung up what I have chosen to call the humour of philosophy. It is not peculiar to our day; philosophy was well known in the last century, especially in dialect. I should like to claim it for the 20th century, however, in a more synthetic form. It is the good humour, as contrasted with wit, comedy, or farce, that Charles S. Brooks calls "primarily human -- or divine."[89] He adds that a good sense of humour is the ability to see the joke when it happens (to oneself) and not merely in retrospect. It is a voice well-placed in the resonances, pleasing even when the melody is non-descript; wit is a voice sometimes shrill, sometimes off pitch, sometimes hollow, but carried by the attractiveness of the tune.

Stephen Leacock says that the ability to laugh under trying conditions is not a sign of a sense of humour at all, but "a brave defiance of adverse fate."[90] He is right when referring to a spurious smile

in terrible circumstances. Certainly he is right when he declares there is nothing funny about war, although time has proved that there are many funny things in connection with it. The gift of the perception of the risible, not necessarily in the unfortunate but in connection with the unfortunate,is, to me, a humour of Philosophy. It is the finding amusement in the unpleasant, the relegating to their proper (frequently unimportant) places various disagreeable events. It is establishing a kinship with all men in such universal disasters as the approach of old age or the non-appearance of the plumber. It is merely side-splitting comedy; more often it evokes a warm smile or the walking-up of tears; it is the type of humour that looks upon life, good, bad, horrible, beautiful, and finds it bearable.

The humour of Philosophy is the direct antithesis to satire. The satirist with open eyes sees evil and hates it; perhaps also hates the evil-doers. The humourist, with mirth-crinkled eyes, blinks at evil, understands it, forgives it; and by magnifying in the evil-doer his streak of good, tries to shame out the evil. The one leaves an abscess, the other uses penicillin.

The humour of Philosophy, to my mind, is distinct from others; yet it partakes of them. It would be hard to find a purely philosophical humorous poem, which has savoured out the wit of Words, or humour of Situation, Character, Allusion, unless this is one:

I, who all my life had hurried,
Came to Peter's crowded gate;
And, as usual, was worried,
Fearing that I might be late.
So when I began to jostle
(I forgot that I was dead),
Patient, smiled the old Apostle:
"Take your eternity," he said.

"Brown's Descent" [20] is a narrative which reveals character, and through character a philosophy. Even more, "The Fiddler of Dooney" [21] is only superficially a character poem. The old man is quaint; and the picture highly amusing:

> When we come at last to the end of the road,
> To Peter, sitting in state,
> He will smile on the three old spirits,

but in the conviction that

> — The good are always the merry,
> Save by an evil chance,

he is expounding a philosophy, preaching the doctrine of St. Francis, following the theology of the Christian religion.

Methods of humour have changed enormously in this century. Perhaps the unusual is still the funniest thing extant, but the commonplace has won a new place in the comic sun. C.E. Montague spoke about the "shining novelty of old things and — the thrill that there is in commonplaces." [22] Today's humourist can see the exquisite ornament in the commonplace; and in pointing it out, is pointing out its divergence from the divine. Ogden Nash is par excellence the greatest exponent of the art of finding fun in little things; and in that way, I think, his work qualifies as Philosophical humour. It is universal, shared, and funny.

Mr. Nash, too, has given us a new form of comic imitation that is uproarious. This is the imitation of very bad poetry, of rhymes approximate rather than accurate, of words distorted enormously, of lines sprung to the limit of endurance. This imitation might be superfluous, if it were not so inventive, so clever. In reading Mr. Nash's verse, one does not sneer at it, nor, through it,

at all the bad verse that has inspired it. One is lost (if not in helpless laughter) in admiration for the variety and ingenuity of his metres and rhyme schemes, such as,

I do not like the summer sun
That scorches the horizon,
Though some delight in fahrenheit,
To me it's deeply pious.
I think that life would be more fun,
Without the simmering summer sun; 33

for his mastery of words, e.g.,

Torpor and sloth, torpor and sloth,
These are the cooks that unseason the broth,
—
He who is slothful, he who is temporal,
Will not be promoted to sergeant or corporal,
No temporal dreamy, no contemporary slother —
34

for his real lyric ability:

Shining like the morning star,
Like the twilight shining,
Haunted by a calendar,
Hirsute sits a-pining; 35

for his acute observation:

Toto
Goto
So different and yet so identical
Each step achieved
Is simply too good to be believed,
Foot before follows foot
And somehow manages to stay put,
Arms wildly semaphore -- ! 36

for his literary allusions: classic, English, etc.; but most of all for his philosophy of the commonplace, such as we see in his "Procrastination is all of the time." 45

Today's treatment of butts is vastly different from that of former times, and, I think, more sympathetic. To be sure, we are willing to ridicule every idea but our own (not a modern state of

affairs), but there is (I think) less rigidity in our ridicule, and a more comradely attitude. Fear, for instance, in a comic character of previous days, made him a coward to be scorned. Now, urged on by the psychiatrists, we all admit great gardens full of fears, and are happy to invite guests in to look at the flowers, to join in our mirth over the largest ones.[38]

I cannot claim any great increase of humanity in our mocking of institutions. We have changed our taboos, however. We may make fun of any religion or sect except the Jewish. That may be kindness, because Jews have lately suffered much for being Jews, and we champion them as underdogs. We can also attack any government, but we dare whisper no word of ridicule of the labourer, for fear of John L. Lewis and other modern kings. Marriage is still at our mercy. With our new social teaching, nothing is too insignificant for sympathy; although we laugh at insignificant things and people.[39]

At the risk of seeming repetitious, I shall say that in our laughter at various men, we no longer single out the extremes, the exaggerations. Since few people are extreme exaggerations, this trend means that we are becoming more universal. The very old men and the very young men are yielding the centre of the target to the middle-aged men, and the verse written making fun of them for blundering with their bi-focals, for dreading dancing, or for finding college students much younger than they were twenty-five years ago, are all written by the middle-aged. This, then, is a sympathetic treatment of butts; it is new, it is a "grow-old-along-with me"-because-I-can-still-laugh type of philosophy.[40]

Women have joined cripples and imbeciles in an immunity from laughter for themselves alone. They are still laughed at for foibles peculiar to the sex, but not for the sex itself. And today, finally enough, it is the men who take up the cudgels for the women. A woman, if she wants to fight, will not defend women, but will attack men,[42] or will include both in her ontire.[43] For women, too, allow themselves to be laughed at; laugh at themselves.[40]

No discussion of the literature of the 20th century would be complete without mention of the duality of thought that has penetrated even comic verse. This, too, is to me an indication of a groaning humanity, in that the poet sees two sides to every question. Again Mr. Auden gives us the outstanding example in his poetic prose of Herod's speech.[44] We laugh at Herod.(as we laughed at Hitler), yet Herod is a reasonable being. Herod, in fact, is Reason incarnate; and his gratified musings of "---- the truck drivers no longer carry guns. Things are beginning to take shape --- Yes, in twenty years I have managed to do a little," are the words of every right-thinking administrator, every reformer who has, with the interests of humanity close to his heart, tried to overcome superstition and violence. And yet, again, Herod cannot be right. Of the birth of Christ he says, "If this rumour is not stamped out now, in a few years it is capable of dissolving the whole Empire --- Reason will be replaced by Revelation --- Civilization must be saved even if this means standing for the Military." We enter into his problem, and are torn with the ambivalence of the struggle between Reason and Revelation. Then we are stopped short in the middle of contemplating "Why can't they see that the notion of a finite God is

absurd?" when Herod breaks out with a list of ludicrous virtues in self-justification.

Here Mr. Auden is not merely mischievous, nor is he merely angling for laughs, at the expense of tone. I think he is showing the break-down of the rational attitude, which begins (once having got through the nursery of acknowledgments) in a mature way, and ends with the helpless cry of a child, "I want everyone to be happy. I wish I had never been born."

Yet Mr. Auden does not deny the rational attitude. Herod was not altogether wrong when he prophesied, "Whole cosmogonies will be erected out of some forgotten personal resentment, complete epics written in private languages, the heads of school children ranked above the greatest masterpieces." — "The Rough Diamond, the Consumptive Whore, the bandit who is good to his mother, the epileptic girl who has a way with animals will be the heroes and heroines of the New Tragedy when the general, the statesman, and the philosopher have become the butt of every farce and satire."

Dissonances are allowed in the harmony of today that would have shocked Mozart and Beethoven. So our laughter is more conflicting, more complex, is charged with the doubts, fears, and even sorrows of our modern days. Sweet laughter is flavoured with bitter for those who have the palate to taste it.

In short, while we may laugh heartily at Herod, we cannot either follow or repudiate him. He plants in our minds a double-edged seed of thought that will keep our grey matter active in the contemplation of problems that concern us and our fellow men, of

what Stephen Leacock calls the "long mystery of the tomorrow."[45] "Humour," he adds, becomes the contemplation and interpretation of life."

This, I feel, is the ultimate kindness.

FOOTNOTES TO CHAPTER XIX

1 Tennyson, "Ulysses," l. 18

2 T.S. Eliot, "The Wasteland," Poems. (Faber and Faber, London, 1946.

3 Pope, "The Rape of the Lock," Poems.(American Publishers Corporation).

4 See Chapter IX, page 102.

5 E.A. Robinson, "Miniver Cheevy," The Book of Humorous Verse, compiled by Carolyn Wells, (Garden City, New York) p. 280.

6 Clarence Day, "And]Or", The Pocket Book of Humorous Verse, ed. Wood, (Pocket Books, Inc.) p. 15.

7 Such, e.g., I find "Consider," of W.H. Auden, but I am neither sufficiently well-read nor astute to offer the suggestion as more than my opinion. "Letter to Lord Byron", too, seems to me less an attempt at pure entertainment or satire, than a tentative essay into the popular poetics of self-analysis which ended with Mr. Auden's inability to suppress his findings.

8 See, e.g. G. Benet, "Epistre en Roy, par Benet, étant malade à Paris," (Larousse, Paris) l. 66, "Il m plesant touche à vous faire rire."

9 J. Swift, "A Modest Proposal". 20th Century Poetry and Prose, ed. Brewold et al. (The Ronald Press, N.Y.)

10 See Chapter V, page 68.

11 Molière, Le Misanthrope. (Larousse, Paris)

12 Thos. Hardy, "The Ruined Maid," Wells, op. cit.

13 cf. Thos. Hardy, "The Impercipient," (Wessex and Other Poems. (Harper Bro., London.)

14 Cf. Thos. Hardy, "In the Days of Crinoline," Ketford, op. cit. p. 235

——— "At a Watering Place". p. 503 , Poems and Other Poems. Op. cit.

15 D. Parker, "On Being A Woman," Wells, op. cit. p. 908.

16 ———"Theory" Wells, op. cit. p. 902.

17 ———"Ballade of Unfortunate Mammals," Ellis, loc.cit.

18 W.H. Auden, "Victor Was a Little Baby," Collected Poetry, (Random House, New York)p. 223

19 ——— "Song XII" Poetry, op. cit.p. 209.

20 D. Nathan, "A Korean Christmas Carol", The Winnipeg Free Press, December 15, 1951.

21 C.F.Leland, "Lass Breitmann Gife a Party", Wells, op. cit. p. 669.

22. F.C. Hebert, Sarah Binks, (Oxford University Press).

23 From my childhood, although not mine. That, but for the grace of God, translated I.

24 O. Nash, "Five Verses," The Face in Fashion, (Garden City Publishing Co., New York) p. 145.

25 Cf. Frank Sidgwick, "Four Four", Ketford, op. cit. p. 227.

26 Cf. Robert Frost, "Brown's Descent," Ketford, op. cit. p. 8.

27 See Introduction, page iv of thesis.

28 S. Leacock,"War and Humour", from My Remarkable Uncle, quoted in Canadian Accent, ed. Gustafson, (Penguin 404).

29 Christopher Morley, "Epitaph for Any New Yorker," Yetor, op.cit. p. 172.

30 Robert Frost, "Brown's Descent," Ketford, op. cit. p. 8.

31 W.B. Yeats, "The Fiddler of Dooney," Yetor, op. cit. p. 514

58 C.E. Montague, A Writer's Notes on His Trade, (Pelican, 1949) p. 112.

59 O. Nash, "It's Never Fair Weather," cf. also "Pretty Halcyon Days," etc. The Face is Familiar. (Garden City, New York) p. 40 and p. 169.

60 ——— "Procrastination is all of the Time, op. cit. p. 31. cf. "Nevertheless," p. 52. "I Know You'll Like Them," p. 73.

61 ——— "A Lady Thinks She is Thirty," p. 89.

62 ——— "It Can't be the Milk," p. 40. cf. "Beside Bermuda," p. 104.

63 ———cf. "Oh, Stop being Thankful all over the Place." p. 95, or "Procrastination is all of the Time," p. 31

64 ——— "The Wombat," p. 208, etc.

65 See Introduction, page xii. William Hazlitt, "One rich course ———"

66 Cf. Margaret Fishback, "Violet," Harper, p. 300.

67 Cf. O. Nash, "What almost every woman Knows," The Face op. cit. p. 110. Cf. also O. Day, "Tell No, Hermit," The Best of Clarence Day. (Alfred A. Knopf)

68 Cf. Margaret McGovern, "Madeline at Jefferson Market Night Court," Harper, p. 300.

69 Cf. Dorothy Parker, "Unfortunate Co-Incidence," Harper, p. 300.

70 W.H. Auden, "For the Time Being," Collected Poetry, op. cit. p. 454 et seq.

71 S. Leacock, Humor, op. cit. p. 10.

Coda

The temperature has risen to survey heat. In laughing at the commonplace, in exercising our brains to find fun in words, we are basking in the comfortable warmth of a delightful day; so, too, in the philosophical contemplation of all amusing things. But when we discover that we are chuckling over something heart-rending, we realize that July is not all balmy weather. The heat becomes oppressive. And in a sudden brilliant flash of light, our eyes have double vision, our minds are bewildered, and our hearts are troubled. We become very hot indeed.

All in all, the best humorous poetry of the 20th century shows a kindness, a sympathy, a humanity, which has not appeared in previous eras; has not appeared because it is the result of a growth, an evolution in humorous thought as marked as the growth and evolution of the brain, or of man himself. Of this I am convinced, passionately, obstinately convinced.

But am I right?

Jokes in mind, I am assailed by the old story of Mr. A and Mr. B who were discussing wisdom.

"A wise man ponders," said Mr. A, "he is never certain, never positive."

"Oh, I don't know about that," hesitated Mr. B.

"But I am sure of it," snapped Mr. A.

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