

## The Philosophy of Punning.

"Puns, new and old,  
Glitter like gold."



SOME of the sayings of our humorists are so full of vitality they palpitate with life, and "almost bleed if you touch them." The comical comes of the "sudden relaxation of the serious pressure upon us." Now the weight of a great sorrow presses tears out of the heart, then an awkward speech, or ridiculous gesture, provoke irresistible laughter. The quick jolting out of the rut of ordinary sensation and experience shakes the risible faculties in spite of the frigid attempts to maintain a cold feeling of nonchalance, and the icy indifference, mistaken by some persons for true dignity and lofty loyalty to aristocratic emotion and culture. Aventine laughed himself to death at hearing an absurd story. Holmes said he dare not be "as funny as he could."

Lowell made Massachusetts grin from the Connecticut line to Cape Cod (a broad grin) over a humorous song, which revolutionized the politics of the "Old Bay State." John G. Saxe excused himself for disappointing a lyceum audience by telegraphing to the president of the association that a misadventure on the railroad had detained him; and that he could not go without "the locomotive—the only motive for riding on a rail." A good double pun: and it is of puns and punning I wish to speak. Punning is not the highest form of wit: and he who constantly uses it, says the witty Boston doctor, "is like a business man who pays his debts with pennies or postal currency, and disburses small change on all occasions; because he keeps no bank account, and has nothing valuable on deposit." The distinguished poet and humorist adds: "A punster is like a boy putting pennies on a railroad track; he may upset a whole freight train of conversation in his efforts to flatten a witticism." The habit of coining puns is almost as bad as literary larceny, because it debases the currency of language, and encourages the circulation of counterfeit thought and diction. It must be admitted, however, that some of the most brilliant writers and orators, and some of the greatest wits and humorists, have succeeded in putting a vast deal of meaning into a pun. Hood said that if he were "punished for every pun he shed he would not have a puny shed in which to hide his punished head." Again he said, he "told the sexton and the sexton tolled the bell." Daniel Purcell, the famous punster, was desired to make an extempore pun. "Upon what subject?" said Daniel. "The king," answered the other. "Oh, sir," said he, "the king is no subject." A London bookseller advertised the "Memoirs of Charles the First, with a head capitally executed." A facetious man of the name of Bearcroft told his friend, Mr. Vansittart, "Your name is such a long one, I shall drop the sittart and call you Van, for the future." "With all my heart," said he; "by the same rule, I shall drop *croft* and call you

bear." "What is the matter?" inquired a passer by, observing a crowd collected around a black fellow, whom an officer was attempting to secure to put on board an outward-bound whale-ship from which he had deserted. "Matter—matter enough," exclaimed the delinquent—"pressing a poor negro to get oil." "I live in Julia's eyes," said an affected dandy in Colman's hearing. "I don't wonder at it," replied George, "since I observed she had a *sty* in them when I saw her last." The attempt to run over the King of the French with a cab, "looked like a conspiracy to overturn monarchy by a *common wheel*," exclaimed a wit. A person speaking of an acquaintance who, though extremely avaricious, was always abusing the avarice of others: "Is it not strange that this man will not take the beam out of his own eye before he attempts the mote in other people's?" "Why, so I dare say he would," cried Sheridan, "if he was sure of selling the *timber*."

Fun is a fine art, and demands the use of esthetic taste—of fine feeling, of sound sense, of delicate fancy. Coarseness will spoil a witticism or a sunburst of humor. Wit is full of spirit and will not yield to the bit and bridle of tyrannic rule. It leaps over, or breaks through the fences of philosophy and rhetoric, as untamed horses do through or over hedges, to get into good clover. You cannot reduce a pun to rules. It cannot be weighed and measured like parcels in a drug store. A joke analyzed, taken apart, and put together again, is like an addled egg shaken in the shell—it is unmarketable and dangerous to crack. The risible faculties have little respect for logic and mathematical calculations. It is impossible to limit a laugh by the use of a yardstick, or to ascertain its weight by the employment of grocers' scales. The genuine pun may span both wit and humor, or it may embrace only one of these intellectual qualities. Its point may stick out, so to speak, in a word having a double meaning, in a sentiment which half reveals and half covers incongruity of thought and speech. Wit laughs at everybody, and as John Van Buren would have said, "it can whistle at a funeral." Humor laughs with everybody and leaves no sting behind it. Hazlit says, "it is closely allied to pathos, and seems to secrete tears." Harry Clapp, who was the king of the New York Bohemians, speaking of hard times a score of years ago, said that "beef was never so high since the cow jumped over the moon." That was a genial sunburst of good nature, hurting no one, not even the man in the moon, and if he has a particle of mirth in his make-up he must have laughed when he heard it, although he is cold and distant. Wit is cranky and scornful, and it seems to take delight in hitting one with quotations and pricking another with invidious contrasts. "It tosses analogies in your teeth, and it shoots its feathered shafts before you can lift a shield." Humor carries a benediction in its face, its voice cheers like music, and it has a smile and a good word for every one. The punster often carries the stiletto of wit and the mask of humor. He employs his intellectual pyrotechny for the amusement and for the edification and not

infrequently for the punishment of others. "I will spit upon the Whig platform," said Horace Greeley. "Then you will not expect to rate as a Whig," said a wag. Foote, seeing a violin player in front of his house said, "one scraper at the door is enough." Charles Lamb who stuttered with his tongue but not with his pen, seeing a man playing at cards with hands that needed washing, said, "If dirt were trumps what a *hand* you would hold." Herold, an egotistical scribbler, once met Douglas Jerrold, and said to him, "You are an author, so am I an author; we are both rowing in the same boat." "Yes, but with different *sculls*," said Jerrold. Theodore Hook seeing the sign of a bear in front of an inn, said to the landlord, "I suppose what you have to drink is of your own *bruin*." Sheridan went to a public meeting before it was organized, and failing to get a seat he cried out, "will somebody move that I may take the chair." Some one advised the use of lager as a tonic. "It is *Teutonic*," said a wit. A student in a Latin class asked his teacher for a goose, but he got no answer. The younger Adams's were disappointed because their father, Charles Francis Adams, failed to get the nomination for President, whereat a wit exclaimed, "the Adams's never did take stock in anything above *Pa*."

"How have you escaped the catastrophe of the Commune?" asked the Russian ambassador of Rothschild. "We Israelites," said the great financier, "have the privilege of *crossing the Red Sea dry shod*." It has been said of Doctor Oliver Wendell Holmes,

Although his profession runs into the ground,  
And some of his patients sleep under the mound,  
His wit could awaken their risible cough,  
Though their spirits had gone where the Croton's cut off.

When Sheridan solicited the votes of the shoemakers of Stamford, England, he exclaimed, "May the *trade* of Stamford be trampled under the foot of all the world." The shoemakers did not see the point, and they were deeply offended. They did not follow the *thread* of his speech, they waxed wrathful and he did not get *awl* their support, their *soles* were lifted with disgust, their *last* respect for him was exhausted.

Sydney Smith says "that our pleasure arising from a 'bull' proceeds from our surprise at suddenly discovering things to be dissimilar, which we have thought to be similar." Pure wit, not always put into puns, is born of sense and imagination, and like pure poetry it is the offspring of genius; and yet it is a humbler child of the same royal family. Wit changes the tone and tenor of a thought as a flash of lightning reverses the polarity of the mariner's compass. It dissolves dissimilarities and incongruities, so that they fuse and flow into moulds of fancy to suit the wish of the caustic surveyor of events and of human history. The pun either touches "two ideas with one expression, or it touches two objects with one idea."

Henry Ward Beecher said, "You *dam* the river of my speech with your applause, and I do not want to be *dammed*." An Irishman remarked that a toper's nose was like a *volcano* because of the eruptions of the *cratur*. Goldsmith's Maid is a "*musical mare* (said some

one) because she beats her own time." He is a gentleman and a sculler was said of one of the Harvard boatmen. A sailor kissed a young lady, she boxed his ears and he exclaimed, "That's my luck, I am wrecked again on the coral reef." "Are you building a castle in Spain?" said a lady to her guest, who was looking seriously into his coffee cup. "Only looking over my grounds in Java," was the answer. A young lady of fortune would have accepted the hand and heart of her beau if he had promised to give up his habit of smoking.

"But he, when thus she brought him to the scratch,  
Lit his cigar, and threw away the match."

There are puns that buzz and sting like angry wasps; and there are puns that hum as musically as golden bees that bring honey and leave no stings. An old gentleman who had seen better days, but who still retained a considerable stock in family pride, called my attention to a valuable team of four mules, the property of one of his relatives. "Them are my brother-in-law's," said he. Some one speaking of a certain school of politicians, who manipulate ward and city politics to suit their own convenience, said that they were born with their fingers in rings. It may have been the same writer who was alluding to a committee of city magnates, said, "They put their heads together to make a wooden pavement." "Why was it so hard and difficult to get Andy Johnson out of the presidential chair?" inquired a curious individual. "Because he went in tight," was the answer. Not unfrequently the imitative faculty helps to illustrate and enforce a witticism; it is like feathers added to the Parthian arrow. "Can you tell me the way to Cork?" inquired a traveler of an Irishman named Kenny. "No," said he, "but this is the way," lifting a bottle to his lips, "to Kilkenny." Perhaps the benevolent gentleman who solicited aid for the poor did not think of punning when he said, "Every cord of wood given to a poor widow is recorded in heaven." Sydney Smith, who will be remembered for his wit when the wisdom and eloquence of his sermons and essays have been forgotten, told a missionary who was going to preach to the heathen, that "he hoped he would agree with the cannibals who would eat him." There is more ill manners than wit in the following farewell of two lovers (!): "Good night, my deer," said the man; "Good night, my boar," said the young woman. Another lover, who was courting a very rich and very ugly woman, said it was not her face but her figure that attracted him. The following is fresh and sparkling: a young lady arose and took an early walk in the meadows on summer mornings before she sat down to breakfast: "Let her have dew on her," remarked a wag. It was an Irishman who said love is a tinder sentiment before it becomes a flame.

Here is a proof that the ruling sentiment of humor was strong in death. A soldier had been shot down in our late civil war, and his cheek had been torn away; while he was prone and bleeding on the ground, one of his comrades asked him if he could do anything for him. "Well," said he, in a whisper, "I should like a drink of water if I had the face to ask for it." This is a pleasant play upon

words: "When women vote we shall have a handsome majority." If long-winded orators will read and heed the following, it may relieve a suffering people: "A smooth bore of a speech scatters like a needle gun." Another said that "the organ of speech was an organ without stops." And this is good advice: "Hem the morning with devotion and the hours of the day will not unravel." "Women will be ciphers, while men are vulgar fractions," said a gallant reformer. "Some books are like Acts of Congress, to be read by their titles and then passed." "It is dangerous to go to church when there is a cannon in the doctrines, a great gun in the pulpit, and a strong man to make the charge." "Wanted the life of Napoleon, with or without cuts." This has a sting in it: He has an ought on the wrong side of the digit, and the multiplication of figures does not add to his importance. The wit of Archbishop Whately, especially his after-dinner wit, sparkled like salt in fire; his facetious sallies and happy hits were unstudied and apropos. When Dr. Gregg, who had been made Bishop of Cork, was dining with Whately, the wine stood untasted before him for a considerable time, when the Archbishop quaintly observed: "Come, though you are John Cork, you must not stop the bottle here." The answer of Dr. Gregg was just as apt: "I see your Lordship is determined to draw me out." The brilliant wit of these gentlemen had a substratum of common sense, large intelligence, and sensitive conscience.

Now and then, here and there, we find the kernel of wit in the nuts of toasts cracked at dinner parties. Some printers, the men of the "art preservative of arts," uttered this sentiment: "May you have plenty of small caps for the heads of original articles." In the bar-room quarrels over politics the eyes and the nose decide the disputes, that is when they are spirited.

When a good lesson crops out of a pun, its flavor of wit or humor has a direct tendency not only to amuse and please, but to improve and benefit society. Tack a good moral to the tail of the kite you fly in the pure air of good manners and good principles, and it will encourage the good habit of looking up at the sky. The manager of a theater in St. Louis offered a silver cup to the person who would give the best conundrum. This won the prize: "Why is the man who presents the cup at this theater like a liquor seller?" Here is the answer, bristling with pointed puns: "Because he presents the cup which brings many to the pit, while those above are in tiers." Here is another in the same vein, too good to be omitted, only it comes in the form of question and answer, and not in the puzzling mist of a conundrum: "If the devil should lose his tail, where could he get another?" "Where bad spirits are retailed." Oliver Wendell Holmes, seeing a small thin man courting a large fat woman, said: "Parva scintilla magnum ignem incidit"—in plain English, "A small spark kindles a great flame." This flash of humor in Latin reminds of another from the same source. A meeting-house had been torn down, and its doors and pews were used by the sexton or some one else as a fence for his yard or garden. The poet and wit, seeing

the uses to which this portion of the old building had been turned, cried out, "Proh pudor" (for shame).

The recent discoveries made by Dr. Schlie-mann led to some conversation about the battles between the Greeks and the Trojans, and the trick of getting into Troy in a wooden horse. The conversationists happened to be near Troy, when a gravel-train passed along. One of the speakers coolly remarked, "In these times the Greeks can enter Troy every day behind an iron horse." Lord B——, who sported a ferocious pair of whiskers, meeting Mr. O'Connell in Dublin, the latter said: "When do you mean to place your whiskers on the peace establishment?" "When you place your tongue on the civil list," was the rejoinder. Horne Tooke, being asked by George III. whether he played at cards, replied, "I cannot, your majesty, tell a king from a knave."

Curran, when opposed to Lord Clare, said that he reminded him of a chimney sweep, who had raised himself, by dark and dusky ways, and then called aloud to his neighbors to witness his dirty elevation." A certain clergyman, famous at one time in Unitarian pulpits, and noticeable for his self-esteem, for reasons best known to himself suddenly stopped preaching, and began to show sympathy with the Episcopal form of worship. "Is S—— intending to leave his church?" inquired one of his friends of a noted critic. "I think not," was the answer. "Well, what is he waiting for?" continued the questioner. "I suppose he is waiting for a vacancy in the Trinity," was the sharp rejoinder.

One asked another why learning was always called a republic. "Forsooth," quoth the other, "because scholars are so poor that they have not a sovereign amongst them." Longfellow, the poet, was introduced to one Longworth, and some one noticed the similarity of the first syllable. "Yes," said the poet, "but in this case I fear Pope's line will apply:

'Worth makes the man, the want of it the fellow.'

Theodore Hook once said to a man at whose table a publisher got very drunk, "Why you appear to have emptied your wine cellar into your book seller." The mere play upon words is not wit; besides, it is tiresome, and, when persisted in, it becomes disgusting. A pure pun needs three qualities: a body of speech, a heart of feeling, and a spirit of sentiment. Nine out of ten of the puns that are coined lack those qualities, hence they are bogus and unfit for general circulation. Only those puns that have been coined from the crags of thought and emotion, and stamped with the mint-mark of genius, are worthy of deposit in the sub-treasury of memory. He who tags an odious comparison to the name of an individual may make a sensation, as the cruel boy does who fastens a tin kettle to a dog's tail and sends him rattling along the street, but he wins no honor, while he gives proof of a heedless lack of mercy. In North Carolina a Frenchman unfamiliar with the English language, and who gloried in the name of Frog, had a son born to him, and was persuaded by a wicked wag to name his heir for the governor of the State, and the governor's name was

Bull. The writer is acquainted with a minister who has a habit of punning on all occasions. In the street, in the pulpit, everywhere, the pun must come the moment it is suggested. "How do you do, doctor?" said a friend to him. "Don't doctor me," was the response. "You are a doctor of divinity, are you not?" "No," said he, "I had rather be a *horse doctor*—it is more stable." This minister wears a scratch, or wig. A friend hastening to overtake him in the street, said, "Hold on, sir, if you please!" "Come along, young man," said the witty divine, "I like to call men of your age young." "Yes," continued the friend for whom he waited, "I was addressing a Young Men's Christian Association the other evening, and I referred to the young men with gray hair, and the young men without hair." "Yes," remarked the minister, "I depend on the old scratch for my hair."

Of punning it may be said it is the champagne of conversation, sparkling and spirited; but it does not impart vigor and strength, and, when moved by the vinous fermentation of wit, it may become offensive and dangerous.

### In the Morning.

**W**HILE morning glories trail the sky,  
And round the waking world  
A thousand jeweled banners lie,  
By guardian hands unfurled;  
My spirit waits in grateful calm,  
For all things good and fair;  
O, angels, bear my greeting forth,  
And, Father, hear my prayer.

**B**LESSING be on those I love!  
Their day be good and fair!  
O, angels, bear my greeting forth,  
And, Father, hear my prayer!

ROSE GERANIUM.

### Children.

BY A SUFFERING AND IRATE BACHELOR.

"Look on this picture, and on this."

**P**OETS and painters in all ages have combined to laud and magnify the matchless virtues of children. They represent them as little cherubs who have left their wings in heaven, angels of milk and cream, whom contact with the world can never turn sour. They have deluded many unoffending innocents into assuming the duties of paternity, and—*horresco referens!*—it is a crime not provided for by law.

For, unfortunately, the real child does not in the least resemble these flights of fancy. He is simply a two-legged animal, with a big head, who is forever in mischief, and horrifies the company with astounding questions:

"Mr. Smith, who will set the North River on fire? My mamma says *you* never will. Mr. Brown, look at my legs; they are not like knitting needles, are they? Sister Helen says yours are."

A certain great man, being asked whether he liked children, replied:

"Yes, madam, at eight o'clock, for then they are sent to bed; and when they are naughty, for then they are taken out of the room."

Even sweet and genial Charles Lamb, when asked *how* he liked babies, answered:

"Boiled, madam."

What unspeakable trouble; what unparalleled disorder is occasioned by these baptized little demons? One can neither think, work, nor converse, when they are present. They choose the moment when you are battering your brains for a rhyme to "uncle," to sound a deafening blast on their tin trumpets; they beat their drums and hurrah when you are solving a problem; they scratch the furniture with pins and nails; and take as much pleasure in upsetting your fine china and listening to the crash as monkeys, to which family, in fact, they belong. If the portrait of your affianced rests upon the easel, they will watch their opportunity and paint a mustache upon her face with the French blacking. To make a paper boat, they will help themselves to your railroad bonds, your family deeds, your most private and valuable papers. In spite of your watchfulness, they will run off with your false hair, to show to the minister in the parlor who has come to visit you; and loudly clamor for a set of teeth set in gold, "which can be taken out and put in at pleasure, like auntie's," for a Christmas present. They will tie a tin pan to the tail of your favorite dog, and carry the cat round by her caudal appendage, or, as they call it, "by a handle." They will pull a hair out of your horse's mane to fasten to their fish-hooks, and escape being kicked to death by a miracle. If you take a small boy to a place of amusement and say that he is six years old, my ambitious gentleman will shout out, "No, no; I am seven; I am not a child," and you have to pay full price for him.

But this is not the worst. Children are our spies, our enemies, our denounciators. They observe everything with watchful eyes. Nothing escapes them. The monsters! One learns to tremble at their vicinity! With their pretended innocence and candor, they betray the secrets of the kitchen, the parlor, the boudoir, the toilet. Bridget in the kitchen hides away eggs, flour, and sugar, to take to her family, and gives a bottle of her master's ale to the policeman at the area door. Does she think that no one sees her? Futile idea! Little Johnny tells all about it that same evening at the dinner-table. Afterward, in the drawing-room, he discovers to the disenchanted, discouraged lover the little box from whence is derived the lovely bloom on his sweetheart's cheek, and chuckles as he betrays the cotton lies of her corsage. He pulls out of the lover's pocket the whisker dye, which makes the admired whiskers and the curling mustache so glossy and black; and he takes infinite care to tell every visitor all the depreciating things

which have been said of him on previous occasions.

What indignation, what separations, what direful catastrophes, have not these bandits in jackets and petticoats caused by their startling and unexpected tattlings! And how much do *they* care? Children are naturally ferocious—they delight in cruelty; they pluck out flies' wings; they bury rabbits alive; they play at hanging; they stab their dolls, and dance around with glee to see the saw-aust blood flowing; and thus, naturally, it is never of an unimportant subject that they babble; it is always of something dangerous, as they sit on the lap or dance on the knees of their victims.

Everybody has read the anecdote of the fond mamma, who called her little daughter in to play on the piano for the entertainment of the great Dr. Johnson:

"That piece was very difficult of execution," she simpered, as the child finished.

"And would to God it had been impossible!" roared the irate Dr. Johnson.

Make a note of this, ye exhibiting mammas. Call your drawing-rooms "Tommy Tiddler's Ground;" invasion upon which will be followed by consequences too dire to specify. Padlock the nursery door when you have company to dinner, and talk in unknown tongues when the children are present, if you wish to communicate anything confidential. These rules, with frequent washings, occasional whippings, and keeping *entirely out of sight*, are all that is needed to make your darlings as charming to others as they are to you.

### Bachelors.

BY AN INDIGNANT YOUNG MOTHER.

"Look on this picture, and on this."

**P**ROSE writers, who do not indulge in "flights of fancy," have a solemn duty set before them, when they undertake to "hold the mirror up to nature;" the nature of a crusty old bachelor; the man who thinks that *he* knows, better than any other, the superlative way in which to govern a wife, and to bring up children.

I have an old bachelor uncle, who, returning home after many years of absence in the capitals of Europe, made me a visit of a fortnight. The description of this "curios" may prove a cap, which many another old bachelor might try on, and find an uncommon good fit.

He arrived late in the evening after a long railway journey, but looked as if he had just stepped out of a band-box, trim, snug, and dapper. His hair was parted in the middle with such mathematical precision, that he might have raced in a paper boat or shell, for the correct trimming of which, I am told, that