

SOME HUMOUR OF SOME HUMOURISTS

Humourists are, perhaps, considered to be public property more than those who write more serious themes, for the reason that they have a large sympathy with the grief of others, and sympathy is a quality that is bound to attract whether accompanied by a monetary consideration or otherwise. They hold up to witty criticism the foibles of their neighbours in such a manner as to cause merriment to their victims, and therefore they must naturally answer for the indulgence allowed them.

Be it a paradox or not, it will be noticed that in nearly every instance the writers who have been called upon in the present instance for their methods and inspirations have a sense of seriousness in their answers. "I think and feel tragedy all the time, and I should shine darkly in company with the intellectual lights among which you wish to include me," says an author who modestly wished to be excused from publishing her moods and tenses. And yet this lady is well known for her sallies of wit!

There's not a string attuned to mirth,
But has its chord in melancholy!

Taking it as true, then, that life is no laughing matter, it will be interesting to see how several of the rising authors of the day overcome this seriousness, and by their inspiration and work throw so merry a light over the ever-apparent shades.

"I have not been aware," says John Kendrick Bangs—and even here at once is a seeming case of absolute weariness of being thought a humourist—"for many years either of working or resting. I enjoy both equally. As for inspiration, I cannot call to mind that I ever had any. I apply myself systematically to my work

six mornings each week, and except, under unusual circumstances, never write in the afternoons or evenings. The stuff which appears over my name is not more than a tenth of my copy product, most of



DOROTHY DIX.

which is even more deadly serious than my alleged humour." There is a trace of regret in these words. Does it not seem that Mr. Bangs would gladly throw away his cap and bells and retire into the ranks of the deadly serious writers of the day?

So it is with George Ade in a minor degree. He takes himself a great deal more seriously than would have been expected. "If I really have the sense of humour, surely you do not expect na



THEODOSIA GARRISON.

to sit down in cold blood and discuss my methods or tell how I get my inspirations. Nearly all the stuff I have turned out has been written under great pressure. I had to do my work in such a hurry that I had no time to stop and take mental photographs of my own moods; and as for waiting for an inspiration, if I had waited there wouldn't have been any copy turned in. I have tried several times to discover my own methods of work, for I find that every genuine literary person has a method. Inasmuch as

I have failed to discover any method in my work, I sometimes suspect that I am not a literary person. This suspicion has been corroborated by about a thousand book reviewers in various parts of the country. I will admit that I have made it a rule to try to write the things that people already knew, rather than to tell them something new. It always seemed to me that if one got the right topic the stuff wrote itself. I cannot wear a coat when I am writing, even though the temperature of the room be freezing cold. I use yellow paper and a leaky fountain pen. The typewriting machine alarms me and drives every thought out of my head. The larger part of my work is done in the forenoon, but the work which comes nearest to pleasing me has been done very late at night, when I was in a wakeful and high-strung condition. This has only happened once or twice, but I am hopeful; if I could become a victim of insomnia I might write something good enough for the magazines."

Very different are the methods of Carolyn Wells. Being of the more nervous sex, she naturally pays more attention to her surroundings. "I find it very difficult," she confessed, "to describe just how I do my work. Indeed, I am not sure that I do it at all. I rather think it does me! Of one thing, however, I am certain, my work can only be done upon old mahogany. My den contains three desks and seven tables of that inspiring material, and outside of its mahoganised atmosphere I have never done, nor could I do, a stroke of work. My favourite desk is an imposing structure eight feet high, which was built nearly two hundred years ago, for a German baron, and is a marvel of cunning workmanship with its inlaid woods, mirrors, secret drawers, and ivory columns ending in brass capitals. Whatever success I have had is owing entirely to my old Hamburg desk. Another adjunct of my busy hours is confectionery. One's style depends so largely upon one's choice of sweets. Certain kinds of light verse can only be written while eating pistache bon-bons or candied fruits. Es-says, of course, call for caramels; a play, chocolates; jingles, peppermint sticks; and nonsense-rhymes, marshmallows. I never eat candied violets or rose leaves, because I am a member of the Society for Prevention of Cruelty to Flowers; but



TOM P. MORGAN.



CHARLES BATTELL LOOMIS.



EDWIN L. SABIN.



GEORGE ADE.

when writing for the comic papers I find it helps me to nibble at *marrons glacés*."

Charles Battell Loomis is methodical in his way. Living in the country as he does, existence seems paradisaical. Some people are dissatisfied even on a vacation when all goes right and nothing goes wrong; but not so Mr. Loomis. He is frank and precise in every particular. He

nearly three minutes, after which I read my mail, if the handwriting is legible, and then read the paper. I have taken the *Sun* for the last fifty years, and if I could not get that would go without the news. I am trying to live down the time when I free-lanced on the *Journal* by never buying it at all. After reading my paper, I go into my thinking-room and



GEORGE V. HOBART.

evidently finds fun in working, and certainly in describing how he works. He says: "Like all great writers, I have certain methods of work. I never rise later than breakfast-time. This consists of whatever the maid brings on the table, as I consider that good for the brain. After breakfast I always go for a short walk to the post-office. This consumes

think for three, sometimes even four, minutes. Then I proceed to spread out my thoughts on my typewriter until lunch-time. If my typewriter breaks, I find it hard to spread out my thoughts with a pen, thus giving the lie to the man who said no one could ever get used to a typewriter. The afternoons I give over to elegant leisure, and to thinking what I

will do with my money if I sell what I have written in the morning. Once a week I go out, or rather in, for I live out, to battle with stern editors, and return at night weak from the conflict, and laden with the spoils of war. If they are too spoilt, I destroy them; otherwise, I send them out again. Those editors run the best magazines who print most of my stuff; but in that opinion I do not differ from other writers except that I am more frank. The reason I began writing was because I wanted to, and I will continue as long as editors want me to; only it would be nice if a fellow's best thoughts would come last, instead of flowing out of the spigot at a time when no editor knows they are running."

With Dorothy Dix, cookery seems to be the source from which she draws her inspiration, for she will tell you that some of her most fantastic creations, and those the public has liked best, have been inspired by lobster Newburg, while others have been the result of a simple Welsh rarebit. The combination of these two dishes would scarcely seem to be congruous with the turning out of comic copy, but it is evident that the culinary habit is strong within her, for she admits further: "Being a woman, I write as I cook, without rule, and season to taste. I take a trouble of my own, or my friends—preferably the latter—and dress it up with a liberal supply of the oil of humour, a little of the vinegar of satire, a pinch of the salt of reason, a dash of the cayenne of wit, and enough of the sugar of human kindness to make it sweet to all the world, and the result is sometimes a cheque, and sometimes a returned manuscript. To be funny on inspiration, is one thing. To be funny on demand and by the column, is quite another. The first is a joke on other people; the second is a joke on yourself, and few of us have a keen enough sense of humour to enjoy a laugh at our own expense. I grieve to admit that I am not one of those gifted beings who dash off things in a white heat of genius. I toil and labour, and if I write what sometimes makes other people very tired, I can only say the feeling is mutual. I have suffered, too!"

There have been many theories as to how a "Yawp" is written. It is so out of the common that at first sight it would seem to have a distinctive method of its

own. W. J. Lampton, however, thinks otherwise. These delirious designs with which his name is more or less connected are, according to himself, written at the typewriter. He says to himself in a firm tone: "Gee whizz!" and then, "See?" Then he fills in whatever space may lie between the two termini of the



MINNA IRVING.

effort, and there you are! "Anybody on earth," at least, so the genial Yawper says, "can do it if he knows how." "And yet," he continues, "there are critics who would hold a Yawp up by the tail to the scorn and ridicule of the world. But the world doesn't care for that as long as it may have the blessed privilege of reading the Yawp. Neither does the critic.

Neither does the Yawp. Neither do I. We are a harmonious lot. I am not a genuine poet." (This confession is comforting.) "I write in the easiest way, which is to write it wrong. One does not have to be inspired to do this; so instead of waiting for the divine afflatus, I simply jump aboard of a train of thought,

that she mistook her mission in life, a view which will certainly not be shared by those who have had the pleasure of reading her productions. "I work," she admits, with a sigh, "with a systematic fidelity, which is extremely distasteful to my friends, for five hours every day, with very little plan as to just what will evolve.



AMBROSE BIERCE.

and away I go. I confess I don't do what I want to do. I yearn, above all things, to write cheques for any amount which will be paid on presentation, but something always has prevented the consummation of this cherished desire. Possibly—but I must not anticipate."

Kate Masterson is despondent in her description of her methods. From what she says she evidently is of the opinion

It is always rather a surprise to me, especially if it is any good. When it is, I re-read it with the most thorough, almost childish, enjoyment. This might seem like senility to some, but it has always seemed *very funny* to me. My editors do not always share this keen appreciation of my work. During the ten years I have been writing, my work has always been a serious matter to me, and

there have been no vacations. The proverbial dullness that is the result of a constant routine of work without any play has set in. The fact is, everything is serious to a woman, who was originally intended to be frivolous, and who finds herself writing things. Yet if Eve were alive to-day she would be called on undoubtedly for a signed statement as to her experiences in Eden. And probably she would be asked to make it humorous, poor old girl! Personally, I am always conscious of a certain impropriety in the idea of a woman writing. A society girl shows her shoulders. We show our souls. We get to be emotionally *décolleté*, and think nothing of displaying feelings and fancies that should be hidden. It is all very sad, really. But what is one to do? The only tragedy of life is taking it seriously."

In the far wilds of Iowa, Edwin L. Sabin is thoroughly domesticated. He draws his inspiration from the cottage cat. "Its name," he writes, "is Timothy Wells, familiarly called Timmie, but never addressed by that lack lustre, cheapening appellation, 'Kittie.' 'Kittie' is to a cat what 'Bub' is to a boy. Whatever I write I try on the cat. Time was when I experimented upon my mother, but I speedily found out that she laughed too readily. She was prejudiced in my favour. Besides, mothers are precious, and ought to be handled with care. Then I got a wife. Alas! she, too, proved a partial critic, and she, too, would be hard to replace. Now I have the cat, and he is a great success. He has nine lives. Therefore I need not be afraid to read him everything. He never evinces the least indication of emotion, save in a yawn. With his inscrutable eyes and his grave demeanour, he leads me on and on, ever baiting me with the hope that, perhaps, some day I shall pierce him to the quick. The day upon which I shall make that cat laugh I shall have achieved fame. But he has not laughed yet. He has not even smiled. To my task I devote every moment I can spare from sleeping, eating, mowing the lawn and golf." The best advice to be given Mr. Sabin is to read Lewis Carroll's *Through the Looking-Glass*, and purchase a Cheshire cat!

Minna Irving shares with Kate Masterson the notion that aching hearts and heads must scratch at the pen to make

their readers merry. "I'm saddest when I'm gladderest!" she cries. "And a deep sense of the hollowness of the world and the vanity of human wishes is the exact kind of soil to produce light verse." But even Miss Irving has her cheerful side. "I do my writing," she admits, "at a very untidy table littered with photographs, maps, stationery, etc., a pencil, a pad, and a cup of strong coffee, and—a box of bon-bons. If you can imagine anything more productive of hilarious lines than ink-bottles, mucilage, pads, pencils, sealing wax ends, torn bits of paper, ink stains and pink and white sugar plums in conjunction, you must have a mind that will draw inspiration from anything."

Ambrose Bierce is short, sharp and concise as to his methods of work. "I commonly do my work," he says, "with my legs intertwined, while exuding globes of perspiration and achieving copious protrusions of tongue. This, I understand, is the way most acceptable to my readers, of whom I have only one. This, too, produces the best result, my ability to have written the *Iliad* never having been publicly questioned. If my literary methods do not suit the public, they are at liberty to have my books written by another (an inferior) person!"

The scent of the hay comes with Clinton Scollard's description of how he employs his time. One can see him, according to his own account, working "in a desultory fashion, scarcely two days at the same hour, in my den, in my library, in the garden or in the orchard, or far afield in fine weather. While as for inspiration, everything in the way of life and nature from utmost Ind to utmost Occident." Swearing by Italy, and his homeland hills, that look down on the valley of the Oriskany, Mr. Scollard should be envied that he can draw fun out of hills and woods and valleys, while most of his contemporaries are obliged to put up with the rush of a big city.

"'In rainbows, thunderbolts and wings,' to quote Hood," says Mrs. Theodosia Garrison, "do I find my inspiration. It sounds exceedingly banal to acknowledge that the lack of a new hat claps a saddle on Pegasus, and one throws a lyric to the wolf at the door like a sop to Cerberus, but alas! it is true."

Still yet from the country comes another addition to the how and when a wit

puzzles his brains. Says Tom P. Morgan: "The average humourist doesn't get any inspiration at all; he doesn't have any. I may have to fight a lengthy list of fun-makers because of this announcement, but really they ought not to take umbrage at me, for I freely confess that I am as bad as any of them. The ability to see things from a joke-smith's peculiar view-point is not genius, but merely a kind of mental strabismus. We do not get our material by inspiration, but by theft, assault and battery, and otherwise. A solemn, honest, peace-loving commonality is grabbed, thrown down, turned inside out, and reconstructed into an absurdity. A feeble, hoary-headed idea is ruthlessly set upon, crippled, torn to pieces, put together backwards with a new head or tail on it; the King's English is deliberately murdered—all for a joke! Then, too, everything is funny, if you only think so. If we are city people, how hilarious the knob-kneed ruralist is; and if we live in the country, how mirth-provoking we find the summer boarder. All fads are ridiculous to everybody who is not devoted to them. Every man is a crank but me. Politics, society, all avocations but mine, debt, death, the law, prison, pain, poverty, facial and racial peculiarities, other people's hopes and fears, prunes, the inhabitants of all other communities, the recently rich, the suffering poor, the bald, the baby, the obituary, the ministry, the hangman, the flirt, the fight, the fit, the mule, the *débutante*, the flying machine, the undertaker, the poet, the boil, the volcano, love, charity, whiskers, war, pestilence, famine, the unloaded shotgun—all are very, very funny. All we have to do is just to see them so, write them out and collect our salaries. The ability to manufacture the common or domestic variety of humour does not come by inspiration—it is a disease!"

In a class by itself is a peculiar sort of

humour, which is represented by George V. Hobart. It carries in itself a laugh, which appeals largely to the masses, and Mr. Hobart cannot throw off the habit of talking in Dinkelspielism when he tells of how he does his work, and this is what he says:

"Der only trouble aboud vorking ad der occupation of labour is dot id uses so many loafable moments. I have been inkvired ad how do I vork. Sometimes I dink I vork like a horse—and I could proof id py showing der ouldpud. I haf no rekular hours for working, eggcept ven I sleeb. Ad nine o'clock efery morning I go py my cell in und begin to vorry a lead pencil. Many lead pencils haf came und vent, bud I haf used der same prain efer since I started. Der prain I use vas highly recommended py my parents on my father und mother's side. Id is vun uf dem roll-tob prains mit plendy pigeon-holes, und id has been a goot life-preserfer to me since I chumped into der sea uf liderature. Bedween 9 und 10 I spend der dime dinking, always dinking, und gedding ub courage to vent after der Enklish lankvich, for ve haf always peen bidder enemies to each udder.

"Bedween 10 und 11 I kick ofer my desk, und mit der left hant I grap der Enklish lankvich py der throttle und begin to shake id. Between 11 und 12 my victim is chenerally screaming for helb, bud dare is no vun to safe id, so I stob for lunch. Ven der vun o'clock vissle eggsploodes, der bidder struggle resumes idself, und vunce more I chump ubon der Enklish lankvich und render id unspeakable. Und so id goes all across der liff-long day, und ven der night-dime puds der shudders ub I find myself sidding dare surrounded py poor, squivering vords, all proken und prused und panting for ice-vater. Dis is der blood-t'irsty story uf my life."

La Touche Hancock.

