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A GOOD-HUMOR PLEA.

By Louis Legrand, M. D.

Punning is a *low* species of wit, it finds devotees by thousands, nevertheless; and the wisest, soberest, most frigid of mankind will allow the muscles of his stone-pulpit visage to relax over the unctuous music of the happy pun. Going home the other evening in the cars, while the whole west was crimsoned with the glories of the departed sun, we very soberly observed to an unbending, unsmiling, unsympathetic neighbor: "That is a very *intelligent* sky." "A what?" said he. "A very *intelligent* heaven," we repeated. He was mystified, and at length asked for an explanation. "It is intelligent because it is well *red*," said we. He caught the joke, and before his usually well-trained emotions could be controlled, he actually roared with laughter. As in the case of this reverend sober-sides, the pungency of a good pun will titillate the toughest facial muscle, and send a quick arrow of delight into the sombrest soul.

Vive le mot, *if it be good*.

Many likewise vote a joke as vulgar, and would make a practical application of one a Blackwell's island offence, *if you could believe what they say*; but you perpetrate a good joke upon a fellow, and ten chances to one if the super-decorous man does not relish it more than anybody else. The recent joke perpetrated by Barnum upon his "Democratic" son-in-law, is a case in point: a grand "Wide-Awake" demonstration occurred in Bridgeport, upon which occasion the Republicans of the town illuminated their residences. The son-in-law being a stanch "administration" man, of course kept his house particularly dark. Barnum got a neighbor to invite the Democrat to a walk. In his absence the merciless showman, having everything in readiness, lined all the front windows of the fine mansion of his daughter with candles, and a brilliant illumination immediately followed. The "Wide-Awakes" were delighted immeasurably, for here, they thought, is a most important concession. The procession huzzaed loudly as it passed the building. The son-in-law heard the news of the illumination with incredulity—he had certainly left his house unusually darkened but a few minutes previously, and returned in haste to find that "Barnum

had done it." Now we venture to say everybody enjoyed that joke, and if Barnum should suffer for all such "tricks of wit," he would have to be hung outright.

Vive le Barnum, so long as he jokes.

We have not on this side of the sea, all the fun going on "in this world," by any means. A capital joke comes to us from a reliable witness, perpetrated by artists upon a fellow of the palette, which we may repeat to illustrate the point of our paragraph, namely, that a good joke, well played, is worth more than a double-bloom to the heavy heart. Our narrator may still give his own version of the "incident:—"

It took place at one of the private *soirées* given by M. de Niewekerke, at his new apartments at the Louvre in Paris; and the brilliancy and success of the invention stamped the genius of the joker forever. The society gathered at M. de Niewekerke's is composed entirely of men, and *almost* entirely composed of artists. The joyous crew assembled there one evening last summer. The weather was close and sultry, and the crowd in the apartment, together with the lights, rendered the atmosphere almost suffocating. No wonder that old "Veronese," as the artists call their great idol, the first painter of modern times, overcome by circumstances, should yield to them with a perfectly good grace, as becomes his peculiar philosophy, and stretching himself out almost at full length upon one of the divans, seek forgetfulness of the discomfort occasioned by the oppressive nature of surrounding objects, in a deep and deathlike slumber. Once or twice some friend passing by nudged him, in order to call him to a sense of the mighty presence in which he stood; but he only, good-naturedly opening one eye, declared as usual that he was not asleep—not he, far from it, only thinking—and that he knew perfectly well what was going forward, only the light hurt his sight, rather, and therefore he had closed his eyelids, in order to reflect more comfortably. Our wag happened to be one of the friends to whom old Veronese communicated this unlucky speech. The opportunity was too tempting—the inspiration had arrived—the dullness of the company, the closeness of the atmosphere—everything combined to make the occasion a glorious one.

Everybody present took part in the joke. It served to divert the *ennui* which was fast seizing on the company, and to render the *soirée* one which will be

remembered to the end of time, chronicled in the memoirs of old Veronese, and handed down to future generations of painters, along with his method of laying on colors in the lights and finishing up certain points in his backgrounds, which have never been discovered by any other artist. In an instant the plan was communicated to the company; the host himself, beholding no objection, consented to its execution. The whist and lansquenet tables, which had been set close to the divan where old Veronese lay, now buried in the most comfortable slumber, were surrounded by players. The conversation was carried on at first in a low tone, and then gradually raised. The company walked up and down in pairs, as is the custom at M. de Niewekerke's, while all this time *every light in the apartment was extinguished*, and the curtains drawn close! When all was ready, the servants came in with their trays of ices. They walked up to old Veronese, and managed to rouse him with their importunate advances.

This was the moment expected by the joyous crew with so much interest. Old Veronese started from the divan in dismay.

"Good God! where am I?" exclaimed he, clutching at his cane. The exclamation brought a roar of laughter from the bystanders.

"Hallo! why you said you were not sleeping, old fellow; come, rouse up, and take an ice—here's a capital *mille fruits*," and with that the speaker paused, as though tendering the ice, and, of course, old Veronese not seeing amid the darkness, his terror was increased tenfold, and he sank back upon the divan in a fit of the most intense despair.

"Banco!" cried a voice from the lansquenet table close at hand; and the counters rattled over the green baize, and the fish were counted out, and the money jingled away with bewildering activity.

"Let me collect my senses!" exclaimed poor old Veronese, in faint accents, as he stretched forth his hands to put away the refreshments which were not there. A loud shout of laughter burst from the young *garnemens* who surrounded him.

"Ha, ha! he wants to reflect again," cried they; "let him have his sleep out, poor fellow!" and they turned away to resume their promenading up and down, arm in arm, which the poor victim saw perfectly well, but only with his mind's-eye.

"Two by cards and two by honors!" was the cry from the whist-table at the left of the divan.

"*Pardon*—honors are divided—quite a mistake; I had the king, and my partner took your queen with his ace."

"True—true; *mille pardons*!—whose deal?—my partner's? Ah, so it is, now do try and give us better cards."

Then came the fluttering of the cards as they were dealt, and all the peculiar sounds belonging to the whist-table, until, at last, poor old Veronese, after listening intently, becoming firmly convinced that the great affliction of blindness had overtaken him, sprang from the divan once more, with a piteous cry, and exclaimed, with outstretched arms and a trembling voice:

"Is Doctor V— still here?" Of course the players all turned, and a confusion was created, which added to the scenic effect of the hoax. Doctor V— was called. He came forward.

"What is the matter, *mon ami*? Not ill, I hope?" and he took the poor, helpless hand stretched forth toward him, in a careless, jaunty way, which completed the illusion.

"Well, dear doctor, I know not what has happened; but strange to say, I can't see in the least—everything seems dark. I strain my eyes in vain; in short, I have been struck suddenly blind!" And poor old Veronese sobbed aloud, overcome with agony at the dreadful prospect before him.

"Tut—tut, man," returned the doctor, "a mere fancy. You are not quite awake, that's all. Your eyes look all right. Here, give me a light, somebody—we'll soon see what's the matter."

And somebody did hand him a bronze candlestick from the whist-table, which was made to ring, of course, as it passed, and the doctor took it, and managed to touch the patient's cheek with it, in order to show that it was there; and, pulling up the eyelids, he pretended to look into the eyes, and blew into them, still holding the supposed light; and then inquired, as he waved the candlestick before the patient's eyes, whether he could see the light. The answer in the negative was so awe-struck and so mournful, that the company almost relented: but the inexorable doctor put an end to the feeling by exclaiming:

"Well, *mon ami*, you mustn't be alarmed. I see what is wrong, the nerves are

affected. It will all be right in a day or two, with care. The first precaution must be taken at once. Has any one a clean silk-handkerchief?"

A dozen were immediately produced, and the doctor proceeded to cover up the eyes of the imaginary blind man with the greatest care, taking the utmost precaution, by placing two or three bandages, one over the other, to prevent the smallest ray of light from penetrating.

"You must keep this on the whole night, and in the morning the fit will either have left you altogether, or the consequences will be most serious. But, on no account remove the bandages till I come. In these cases, the contact of the air sometimes produces the most awful result."

The poor painter suffered himself to be led away by the doctor, through the once more well-lighted rooms, and the whole company followed him to the door, with every expression of sympathy, then returned to roar with laughter at the success of the joke. One of the doctor's best stories is that of the next day, when he removed the handkerchiefs, and old Veronese beheld the light. The whole of Paris was at the painter's door that day, and for a long time, letters came pouring in from *soi-disant* religious communities, attributing the cure to a miracle worked at their various altars by the prayers of sundry of his pupils, whose names were set down, of course.

This part of the hoax he found out. It perhaps made him suspect the rest; but he has never, to this day, betrayed his suspicion; and, it is thought by many, that he is hoaxing the hoaxers when he talks of that frightful escape from blindness, and the marvellous talent of Dr. V—, by whom he was rescued from such a terrible calamity.

[Paris has, at all times, been celebrated for its diversions. Sometimes, it is true, the thing has been carried a little too far—as, for instance, in the terrible hundred days when the guillotine was made to do such active duty, that even women and children were disappointed if less than two hundred human heads were severed from living bodies. The diverting *coup d'état* of Louis Napoleon was a trifling mystification as compared with those perpetrated by his *facetious* uncle from the date of his sudden "flight from Egypt," to his "evacuation," preparatory to his little visit to St. Helena. Metternich,

the elder, said the marching of French troops into Rome, to protect the Pope, was *no* joke. But it was a pretty good joke, nevertheless, which will not be played out entirely until the Pope is wrested from his temporal throne, and the Todeschi is driven from Venetia. Nothing less than *such* jokes, it would appear, can appease the insatiable maw of the modern Frenchman, who has come to regard the half-civilized Zouave, as the apostle of his Christianity. Louis Napoleon, like his "stumpy" uncle, realizes this, and doubtless will continue to *amuse* his subjects until the force of public opinion is expressed through English shot and German shell. But all this, *en passant*.]

In earlier times, say at the court of Louis XV., joking was considered one of the "polite arts;" and the young men of the nobles of that day vied with each other in the ingenuity and novelty of the inventions by which they amused the court, at the expense of the unfortunate victims selected by them as the objects of their mystification. The Chevalier de Creffley, the Duc de Richelieu, and Marquis de Balhaumont, were the choice spirits of that time, and kept the town alive with emotion; while in later days, the monarch himself, Louis Dixhuit, was considered the most clever professor of the art in his own kingdom, and practised it with so much success as to have earned far greater fame as joker than as sovereign. The famous hoax of the *Tête de Mort*, was of Louis Dixhuit's invention, and decidedly one of the best of its kind. Then came the story of the Dark Chamber, announced one morning in the journals, as the place where all letters were submitted to a process which rendered the writing within visible through the folds of the paper! This was received with a terrible panic, and, after causing an immense increase in the number of *Commissionaires*, finally gave rise to the use of envelopes, grown so indispensable in our day.

[*Our* nobles (Worcester so spells it), confine their jokes to "operations" in stocks, shares and shaving. The man who can become the greatest "bull" or "bear," is the greatest joker, and, though he may tell hard lies enough to pave Trinity church-yard over, if he succeeds in winning, the joke is repeated to his *credit*. To what base uses can a virtue be diverted!]

If punning and joking were held in

greater popular regard, they doubtless would serve to give a warmer *tone* to our rather uncongenial nationality. In the background of our American character, we see plenty of sunlight playing, occasionally breaking through rifts in the clouds ever above us, and it needs but the genial influences of some central power of *fun* to call the sunlight in copiously. He will prove a true benefactor who, if he does not make laughter a science—as in the days of Louis Quinze—will make good nature and joking epidemic.

A toast to the memory of Charles Lamb, Sydney Smith, Thomas Hood, Douglas Jerrold!

ORDERS OF CHIVALRY.

THE rage for decorations is like all other rages. It increases with age. When, by dint of labor, journeyings, prayers, and sometimes sacrifices, a man possessed by a mania for decorations has obtained his first bit of ribbon, he wants another, then another, then another still, until he has exhausted all the patterns of St. Etienne. Just as a merited decoration is honorable, so a decoration obtained by solicitations and importunity is ridiculous.

How much these bits of ribbon of foreign orders are worth, is known only to those who give and those who receive them. For many of the donors it makes an item in the receipts of their budget. For many others it is real economy. How many petty princes have created orders of chivalry simply for the sake of the fees to be paid by the decorated. These fees vary from 300 to 1,500 francs. But this is a trifle. In England, the fees paid by each knight of the Order of the Thistle amount to £348 sterling, or \$1,740; each knight of the Order of St. Patrick pays £175 sterling, or \$870; each Knight of the Bath, £283 sterling, or \$1,415.

There are in Europe one hundred and twenty-four orders of knighthood, properly so called. Beside these, there are three in Brazil, two in Turkey, and one in Persia. Beside the grand orders, there are in many countries inferior crosses and special insignia to the number of about one hundred and sixty. Lastly, there is a large number of medals, worn with a ribbon of the order, attached to the button-hole. Among these medals there are some highly prized. Such are those that

the emperor of Russia gives especially to merchants. When a merchant, after having obtained a first medal, obtains also a second, the latter is adorned with the emperor's cipher in diamonds.

Prussia has six orders of knighthood, and twelve secondary crosses. The grand duchy of Baden has three orders of knighthood, and two secondary crosses; Saxony, three orders of knighthood; Russia, ten; Denmark, two; Sweden, five; Wurtemberg, three; Bavaria, five; Austria, five for the empire, and four for the kingdom of Italy; Spain, eleven, beside sixty secondary crosses; the Two Sicilies, five; the Grand Duchy of Hesse, four; the Roman States, five, and one military cross; Hanover, two; Belgium, two, counting the iron cross; Saxe-Coburg and Gotha, Saxe-Meiningen and Saxe-Altenburg, one between them; Brunswick, one; Saxe-Weimar, one; Holland, five; Portugal, six; France, one, and one military medal (the Revolution of July extinguished five orders); the Ionian Islands, one; Greece, two; England, four; Parma, one; Lucca, one; Nassau, three; Oldenburg, Anhalt-Bernburg, Anhalt-Coethen, and Anhalt-Desau, one among them; Brazil, three; Turkey, two; and Persia, one.

The first of the Prussian orders is that of the Black Eagle. When Frederick I., then only prince, established it, he named it the order of generosity. Those who receive it have the rank of lieutenant-general. The ribbon is orange, and the cross has four branches, enamelled in blue.

The order of military merit of Baden is hard to obtain. There is one excellent condition: the decoration is refused to any one that asks for it.

The two grand Russian orders are the order of St. Andrew, founded by Peter I., and distributed for the first time on occasion of the massacre of Strelitz, and the order of St. George. The order of St. Andrew gives the rank of lieutenant-general. The order of St. George is given only to one who has captured a vessel, a battery, or a difficult position. To obtain the first class, one must have gained a battle. Only two foreigners have received this order—Wellington and Blucher. The emperors Alexander I. and Nicholas only had the cross of the third class. The Russian order of St. Wladimir is given to savans and artists.

Russia has an order for women—the

order of St. Catherine, of which the Empress is the Grand Mistress, and which Peter the Great founded in honor of his wife's conduct at the battle of the Pruth. The decoration is in diamonds, supported by a red ribbon, and the motto, "For love and for the country." It is an exquisite ornament of the dress.

The king of Sweden has the order of Gustavus Vasa, for farmers.

Among the not easily obtainable are the four English orders of the Garter, the Bath, the Thistle, and St. Patrick; the Austrian order of Maria Teresa, the knights of which are named barons without fees, and may obtain an audience of the sovereign without the intervention of the chamberlain; the Lion of Dannebrog, in Denmark; and the Teutonic order in Prussia.

France used to have an order of the same nature, comprising all the others, and given, among foreigners, only to sovereigns: this was the order of the Holy Ghost. To obtain it, it was necessary to be noble. Nevertheless, there were certain exceptions. Thus, when the king asked the candidate, "Are you noble?" if he answered, "I am, and will prove it," the king said, "I give you a hundred years to prove it." Vauban would not lend himself to this rather harmless falsehood, and did not get the blue ribbon.

In Spain there is an order of women—the royal order of Queen Maria Louisa, created by Charles IV.—a blue and white ribbon, worn as a scarf, with an eight-pointed cross. Austria, also, has an order of women—the order of the Starry Cross, attached to the left side by a black ribbon. Spain has also another order of women. It is worn as a bracelet, but it is reserved for ladies who belonged to the Junta of Women in Cadiz, in the insurrection there.

The Emperor Don Pedro I. created in Brazil the order of the Rose. It was established on occasion of the Emperor's marriage to the princess Amelia of Leuchtenburg. Everything is rose-colored in this order: the ribbon, the six-pointed star surrounded with roses, the decoration of the grand dignitaries, represents a bouquet of roses: the grand cross is supported by a chain of enamelled roses. It is, moreover, not an order of gallantry, but of civil and military merit.

Those persons afflicted with a mania for decorations are referred to Spain, with its sixty crosses; to Bavaria, Saxony, &c.