



The New Zealand Graphic
AND LADIES' JOURNAL.

SATURDAY, MARCH 18, 1898.

PROBABLY the inhabitants of no country in the civilized world, suffer so acutely from the habit of the insane jocularities as do the otherwise fortunate colonists who share with us what we are pleased to call the 'glorious climate' and other innumerable advantages of these fortunate islands. As the *Spectator* in a recent issue observed, 'there is nothing in the world produces the sense of mental nausea more completely, or is more certain to turn the intellectual stomach, than the use of certain jocularities of speech with which so many people think fit to adorn their conversation.' The people who find it impossible to speak of an unmarried man except as a 'gay bachelor' with whom the sea is always 'the dray' or the 'serving pond' and a horse a 'flurry steed'; who eternally talk about 'Sunday go-to-meeting clothes' and who have such phrases as 'no extra charge,' 'agitate the tintinabulator' or 'the noxious weed,' 'the pipe of peace,' 'forty winks,' and 'braving the elements,' for ever on their lips, are capable of producing in those who wish to see language kept clean and bright, a disgust which is absolutely intolerable.

It is difficult to say if these cant phrases—that is a perfectly proper description of them—are more odious when used consciously or unconsciously—that is to say by people who believe them to be funny—and intend that their hearers should consider them funny, or by those who have merely caught them up and repeat them like parrots, and without any intention good or bad. In our own opinion the use of 'common form' jocularities is most offensive in those who think of them as wit, though most painful in people who use them unobtrusively and merely as means of expressing their meaning.

'We feel,' says the *Spectator*, 'that those who try to force a laugh out of such expressions as "my downy couch" or "committing matrimony," who squirm into a smile, as they ask if there isn't "room for a little one," or who speak of "japanising their trotter cases" might fairly be shot at sight. When some excellent mother of a large and heavily facetious family catches up and uses, almost unconsciously, such phrases as "getting outside a square meal," "the clerk of the weather," "she's no chicken," or "put on your war paint," and when a father mechanically talks of "performing his ablutions" the sense of pathos overcomes all other feelings. With such an exhibition before our eyes we can feel only *sent lacrymas rerum*, and pass by with averted heads. As a rule, however, people who take to the use of verbal jocularities combine the mental standpoint of those who try to be funny with the hollow uprightiness of mere imitation. They have a half-hearted idea they are being funny, but at the same time their chief reason for talking of "maternal relatives" and people of the "masculine persuasion" is the fact that those with whom they associate do the same thing. They say "Why this thinness," or "a fine day for the ducks" as they say Yes or No.'

As so many people are jocular without really meaning it it may be worth while to quote some examples of the turns of speech they should avoid. In all probability there are thousands of people of most exemplary behaviour and of excellent moral character in other respects, whose speech is inadvertently strewn with the verbal atrocities against which we are protesting, and who are not in any true sense aware of the shocking exhibition they often make of themselves. Let it not be supposed for a moment that it is only the mixers of the one sex and the 'Arries of the other who are steeped to the lips in beautiful jocularities. Their use is by no means a sign of the vulgar. Plenty of people who would not talk in 'Arryisms may be heard 'recruiting exhausted nature' by a drink from the 'flowing bowl,' and declaring that they are 'full inside,' though they have been 'very peckish.'

All sorts and conditions of men and women, boys and girls, are implicated in our charge, and there is no class or set that can be held blameless. Since, therefore, there are so many unobnoxious sinners, we propose, as we have said above, to select some specially bad examples of jocularities in order that those in need of conversion may have their consciences awakened and so be brought to a better way.

Those who have never realised that they use the most atrocious expressions a hundred times a day will be able to see themselves in a mirror, and understand what their pet phrases sound like when presented in cold blood. We will begin with what is perhaps the most ghastly example in a collection of verbal atrocities placed at our disposal by a champion of what is sound and of good repute in language, thought, and sentiment. We are given to understand that the funny thing to say to a man who comes near to treading on your feet is 'Ware wheat.' 'Ware wheat' is, of course, equal to 'Look out for corn,' or 'Don't tread on my toes.' Anything more disagreeably foolish or ineluctably unpleasant it would be hard to imagine. There is, of course, no harm in talking about corns, but this remote and feeble 'jokelet'—to borrow a phrase loved of the jocular—is positively ghoulish.

After this such phrases as 'spare my blushes,' 'to indite an epistle,' 'to be shot' (that is to be photographed), 'as the poet hath it,' 'good after tea' (for good afternoon), 'playing the giddy garden goat,' sound almost commendable. They must, however, be avoided like the plague, for so catching is the habit of using jocularities that a man who begins with the comparative innocence of 'spare my blushes' may, in time, descend to the degradation of 'ware wheat.'

Another very common and very shocking cant phrase is 'it doesn't suit my peculiar style of beauty,' and almost as bad are 'O.K.' (i.e., all right), 'only his little joke,' 'I like them but they don't like me,' 'there isn't a headache in a hoghead,' and most common of all 'how goes the enemy?' There are in addition many single words which by derivation or association must rank as jocularities. We will, however, only cite one. Can anything be more horrible than the word 'toothsome,' especially when applied, as we have known it applied, to liquor? 'A glass of toothsome Chartrons' is, perhaps the most nauseous form of words it is possible to imagine. It is far worse than that greasy phrase 'the succulent chop of commerce,' which so often passes for wit at the eating house when Runtz asks Bunting what he is going to have for dinner this 'after tea.'

It will perhaps be thought that we ought not to draw this indictment against a whole set of words and phrases without giving some reason for the disapprobation with which we have regarded them. All people capable of forming a rational opinion will, we may safely assume, agree that the cheap and conventional jocularities of the sort we have quoted are to be condemned; but they may still like to have the sources of disgust analysed and investigated.

In our opinion, says the *Spectator*, 'one of the chief reasons why verbal jocularities are so obnoxious is to be found in the fact that they are blurred and defaced by usage. They were originally made of somewhat soft metal, and are now blunted and rubbed into shapeless caricatures of their former selves. They are, in fact, like those worn engravings of pictures one finds in certain boarding houses. The original pictures may have been well enough, but these ten-thousandth impressions are revolting objects. The lights and shadows have all run together, and the effect is deplorable. When Diogenes invited Aristotle to take "pot luck" with him the phrase was bright and clean, it meant something, and was sufficiently humorous. Now, however, it has been used a million times, and is as old and greasy as an up-country bank note. "Feeling below par" may again have been a tolerable Stock Exchange witticism when it was first let off by a prominent member of the Stock Exchange, London, to an admiring friend. Now it is so sorry a joke that in pity the doctors are making it into a technical expression for a condition of health below normal.'

'The boy who first complained of having "a bone in his leg," had no doubt a right to feel proud of his inventiveness; but who feels inclined to laugh at it now. Turns of phrases intended to be comic are all very well, but they must be, as the shops say, "as fresh as fresh." The moment they are the least bit "off colour" they not merely cease to amuse, but are justly the cause of loathing, and become things as abominable as eggs that have ceased to be fresh. In their case,

too, no one has a right to act like the humble curate, who replied, "Fresh enough for me, thank you," when the green tinge in his egg had caused the wife of his benighted brother parson to exclaim, "Dear me, I'm afraid your egg isn't quite fresh!" We can keep the unfreshness of our eggs to ourselves, but not the unfreshness of our jokes.'

In addition to the worn-out jokes whose ghosts, like the ghosts in 'Julius Cæsar,' scream and gibber in the public streets, and bear about them a ghastly mockery of fun, there are some jocularities which were never anything but vulgar and disgusting. They are disgusting because they are disgusting, and of those who cannot recognise them we can only say, as we say of a man who has no sense of smell, that they escape a great deal.

No doubt there remains, when all is said and done, a certain scope for private judgment. The best judges of pictures and music never quite agree in their censures. For example, some would condemn 'A little bird told me' as a jocularities. To the writer in the *Spectator* the phrase is so venerable and historic that he cannot place it among tabooed jocularities. It was under cover of this form of speech that our ancestors passed some dangerous news,

'Ring-a-ding-ding,
I heard a bird sing,
The Parliament soldiers
Are gone to the King.'

That was how the news that Monk was going to bring back Charles spread among the people who had grown tired of the reign of the Saints. To condemn the old phrase may, for all we know, be to condemn the first attempt at the use of an indirect way of expressing a meaning. 'The maids who called on Hertha in deep forest glades' doubtless found the phrase invaluable for introducing some woodland 'on dit' of their own invention.

SECRETS.

WRITTEN FOR THE CHRISTMAS NUMBER OF THE 'NORTH QUEENSLAND REGISTER.'

(BY W. THOMPSON.)

Oh! would that I had known, then had I lived
The days of youth, not idly dreamed the hours
In vain and useless questioning; nor grieved
For that which is beyond mere mortal powers
To know or understand. The Present dowers
Mankind with life enough without the Past;
And that 'which is to be' will be; not ours
Omniscience, to fathom schemes so vast,
The Chalice of Eternity may not be drunk in haste.

Thus never to have lived—to have denied
My heart the love by which a life is crowned,
For vain ambitions thought;—and earth so wide
A sphere of beauty, wherein joys abound
Am I self so strong? O silly fool! profound
Indeed the wisdom of the haughty mind;
Contented with an echo, a faint sound
From all Life's wondrous chimæ; which could not find
The living harmonies that every breath resigned.

The humblest cotter working on the soil,
Glad in the joys of home and love and wife,
Thankful for evening—happy in his toil;
Hath fathomed deeper in this ocean—Life,
Than thou with all thy questioning and strife.
He sought not 'why.' He only knows 'what is'
Enough to satisfy. Earth is not life.
For him with problems—'How and why of this,'
It is enough for him to own his simple bliss.

The happy prattle of his baby child
Meets his return and begs the ready knee;
His gude-wife's kiss—her look so soft and mild
Speak the sweet welcome, 'I am glad for thee,
And thankful for the hour which sets thee free.'
The peaceful languor of the tired frame,
The setting sun—the closing day—the lea
'Where winds the lowing herd,'—all free from blame—
Hath life one meaning more in honours, wealth, or fame?

Would I had been the simple childlike soul
That knows naught of the deep curve of unmet;
That lives and loves, then passes to the goal
Ordained of God and deems that life is blessed—
For him such eanker gnaws not in the breast—
Then would the joys of peace and innocence
Have sweetened life and added each their zest
To tranquil days; have banished from hence
This painful prying thought and restlessness intense.

Such, my regrets! But he who wrecks his Past
Is not the master of his present hour;
We are what we have been, until at last
All hope of change is lost, for lost the power—
The past is like a garden where some flower
Hath bloomed and flourished with a wanton pride
The summer through, then by and bye the sower
Will gather in the seeds, ere autumn tide;
Alas! They are self-sown and scattered far and wide.

BALL PROGRAMMES, ETC.

JUST received, a beautiful assortment of Ball Programmes, also Cards and Pencils. Wedding, Invitation, Visiting Concert and Menu Cards executed on the shortest notice.

NEW ZEALAND GRAPHIC PRINTING WORKS,
SHORTLAND STREET, AUCKLAND.