

# FACTS, FANCIES, QUIPS & COMMENTS

FROM THE AUSTRALIAN PAPERS.

They were discussing the proper way to bring up rabbits, when the young man in the white canvas hat with a light blue band threw away his cigarette and remarked dreamily. "Speaking of raising hairs, when I was up in Canada last year I heard of a hair tonic that was so marvellous it made me somewhat sceptical. Finally I borrowed some of it to try on a tame jack rabbit that had been rather out of sorts ever since his tail got chopped off by accident. I gave him some of it, and it sure toned him up great—in fact, I reckon he's running yet. But he left the loose piece of his tail behind him, and I says to myself, 'It's a poor hair tonic that won't grow hair.' So I tried some of it on that chunk of tail. Well, boys, you can believe me or believe me not, but as sure as my name is Bates that stuff was so powerful that it grew another hare on the tail in nine and three-fifths seconds by my watch." There was silence for 48 seconds, and then the stout man in the pink shirt and the pale green tie with purple spots spoke. "That's what you call a hare raising tail," he murmured in a sudden burst of inspiration.

No one has yet been able to explain why the mere smell of salt water should rouse the prehistoric nature of man, and infuse him with a desire to shed his apparel; but it undoubtedly does. A very respectable stout paterfamilias brought his young family to the beach, and decided to bathe with them. He had arrived early, and only a few people were about; but he had only just got out of the water when a perfect avalanche of women and children arrived, and started arranging their lunch baskets on either side of him. Flight was impossible, shelter there was none. Suddenly he was seized with a brilliant idea. His family had collected a small heap of seaweed. This he crawled beneath, his head projecting one end, his feet the other. In this position he performed his toilette on the small of his back. His children, under the mistaken impression that he was being funny, stood and shrieked at his efforts, but he had the satisfaction of knowing that he was carrying a nice bit of seaweed for the garden.

The late John F. Sheridan had an advantage over many a comedian whose reputation is associated with one part. The greater portion of his life was spent in growing up to the character he lived by, instead of growing down from it. Widow O'Brien might have been anything between 45 and 60, and Sheridan probably was something between 30 and 40 when he first appeared in "Fun on the Bristol" in America. He took it to London about 27 years ago and staged it at the Opera Comique, a house with tunnel entrance, that was long time the home of Gilbert and Sullivan opera. In those days his leading lady was May Livingstone, who played a song-and-dance negress character—of the Topsy order—and was almost a rival "star" to Sheridan. The Widow didn't loom so large then as in after years. My recollections of the performance at the Opera Comique are of a bright May Livingstone, a clever John Sheridan, and a very trashy comedy. Two years later I was in Melbourne when Widow O'Brien and May Livingstone (I think), as the black girl, made their Australian debut at the old Royal, but I didn't then rush to renew my acquaintance with "Fun on the Bristol." It was too silly a thing. The snorting critic of the "Age" referred to it as "a music-hall show," quite out of place at Melbourne's largest and most respected theatre. The piece either improved on acquaintance or was adapted to Australian requirements as time went on, or public taste adapted itself to the piece. The character, colour, and identity of the leading lady were changed, whilst the leading man in the old woman part spread himself more and more. Take Johnnie Sheridan for all in all, we will never look upon his like again—as Widow O'Brien. To begin with, he was a Dublin Jew, and an Irish Israelite is a rarity, anyhow. Face, accent, and humour were severely uncommon and col-

lectively unique. He had Jewish prudence and Irish wit. The last time I talked with him was at Fitzgerald's circus what time Adelina Antonio was performing on the high trapeze. Adelina's "act" terminated in a double somersault backwards from the trapeze into a net. She afterwards killed herself in South America in an attempt to perform the same feat, or another of the same sort. On this occasion, and all other Australian occasions, the charming gymnast got through her somersaults all right, but the experienced eye of Johnnie Sheridan saw more danger in the feat than the admiring multitude had a notion of. And, turning to me, he said, "Well, I'd rather risk my life as a low comedian." Johnnie was more than a low comedian, however. He was a famous character actor—always the same character, but none the less famous on that account.

A very old Australian actor, identified with the earliest productions of "Silver King" is nowadays an inmate of the Austin Hospital for Incurables (Vic.). Johnny Bryan it is. Bryan used to pop up periodically in the second act of "Silver King" as the big burly cabman, who comes along, laden with parcels and a birdcage, to the railway station, in attendance on a sharp-tongued female. She wanted to know whether anything had been forgotten, and the cabman replied, "Well, you haven't brought the kitchen-range or the mangle, but, s'elp me Bob! I think you brought everything else." And when she gave him a shilling for his fare, he protested that he and his 'orse didn't work for money, but for honour and glory, whereupon the angry female called him a rude man, and talked of taking his number. To which he replied, "Take it, marm, take it—and drive the bloomin' cab yourself!" Every old playgoer remembers the figure of Johnnie Bryan's cabman, in the long overcoat with the short capes to it, and the fruity tones of his sarcastic remarks. He had a great opinion of his importance, inasmuch as he was the principal person on the stage what time he was speaking his half-a-dozen lines. On one occasion—recorded in a "Bulletin" of long ago—manager Williamson, offering the veteran an engagement (as the cabman) for another revival of the popular melodrama, informed him that business had been very "off," and salaries all round would have to suffer from the prevailing depression. "Reduce my salary!" said Johnnie. "Consider how successful I have always been. I hold the house from the moment of my entrance. I can feel it here," and the proud mummer struck his chest in a majestic manner. J.C.W. ventured to observe that the cabman was but a very small character. Drawing himself up to the full height of his dignity the good old egoist replied: "Mr. Williamson, the value of a work of art is not measured by its dimensions. A very small painting

by Meissonier commands a very high price!" Possibly the argument prevailed. The unconscious humour of it should have been irresistible.

A social ukase has gone forth, and lo! if Lady Dudley can help it there is to be no more "Kitchen" lancing in the dancing halls of our Nicest People. The staid consort of the potentate for whose possession State Premiers, A.N.A. officials and the like wrestle with such dogged energy, has expressed her dislike of robbing amongst society grown-ups, and urged that it shall cease. As a matter of fact, ball-room boisterousness has been a witted fashion in the headquarters of etiquette for some years. The "kitchen" lancer habit and its accompanying uproariousness came into vogue a little over a decade ago. A gentle, peaceable class was maligning when the new fashion was baptised. The noise and rush and violence of it was not borrowed from the silent and depressed regions where the cockroach lies down with the lamb, and meets, all too often, a painful end in a cauldron of boiling soup as a result. On the contrary, it originated at the various joyous London haunts—now closed by a Puritanical body of police—where most of the gilded, and a few of the silver-plated youths of London used to repair after supper at the Savoy or Carlton. I have it on the authority of an unregenerate male relative, who has personal experience to back up his words, that at these resorts—the lineal descendants of Cremorne and Vauxhall Gardens—the lancers took on the semblance of a Broken Hill riot. The male participants were Debrett inmates for the most part, and through their agency the new convention filtered to private entertainments of an elevated social order. Your "Akenehi" remembers hearing about a "small dance" in London some years ago. A band of Bachelors' clubbies (who are among the "smartest" of London clubbies) was there. When the cotillon flourishes were carried in the somewhat vinous glee of the young men passed all bounds. An aged butler, whose silvern locks and stern, judicial bearing, would have surely rendered him immune from insults in the lowest class of suburban council chamber hereabouts, was propelled through the hall-room doorway clinging frantically to the remains of a huge Chinese umbrella. Howls of approval greeted his advent, and more howls followed behind him. No one minded. The excellence of the "rag" condoned the damage to property and butler. But this sort of revelry has been relegated long since to fashion's scrap-heap. It is a belated and undesirable survival locally—like such remnants of Free-trade as still remain unburied. The up-to-date smart-setter diets, drinks mineral waters, endures the simple life, and tin public looks down his or her nose with much demureness. —"Akenehi," in Sydney "Bulletin."

Police-men who believe in lucky and unlucky stations are up against a tough proposition in the Marryatville (S.A.) job. The last three men who occupied the post have all come to a rapid end, and two of them so violently that the Commissioner of Police finds it difficult to induce anyone to be the fourth victim.

The first took it into his head to commit suicide; the second had only been transferred to Glenelg for a short time before he was murdered by a fisherman; and the third (Constable Hyde) provided target practice for three desperados. Hyde intercepted one of half-a-dozen bullets and went to the Heavenly Beat a few days later.


The coast about Champion Bay (W.A.) is infested with sharks. Each shark is invariably accompanied by two pilot fish. Why two? It is a curious question, and puzzling. Conversing with an ichthyologist on this point, I was surprised to hear him cast some doubt on the fact. His view (not gleaned from personal observation, by-the-by) was that there is often one than two pilots with the shark, and sometimes there are a number. The shark is, as a fact, sometimes seen unaccompanied by pilots, but when the latter do accompany it, the number is always two; and this fact is so well known that the aboriginal draftsmen invariably depict this number on their representations of the shark—an object which they are very fond of painting on the rocks of the coast. While I was off one of the islands, noted on the chart as Rat Island, a shark glided slowly under the boat. The appearance of all fish in the depths of the sea is deceptive to the eye, but this shark was remarked by all the fishermen as being enormous. It was accompanied by the usual pair of pilots—one swimming close to the snout, the other near the right side. Neither book nor naturalist that I have yet met with has given a satisfactory explanation of the whyness of the pilot. On the West Coast of Australia I never saw a shark without its attendant scouts—if scouts they are. They seem to guide or warn the shark in some way, but I could never discover proof that they really do so. When the sharks are seen without pilots the latter are probably lurking somewhere near at hand. The pilots never go in shoals, large or small, in Australian waters. Four or five is the greatest number ever seen together; but when many sharks are assembled in one spot, each seems to be accompanied by its pair of attendants. This refers to the common blue and white sharks only; the basking-shark and smaller sharks have no pilots. It is certain that some mutual benefit follows the association of creatures so incongruous in general habits and organisation, otherwise the pilot-fish would not be safe in the other fellow's company.

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