

# LAUGHING AT THE QUIPS OF ANCIENT GREECE AND ROME

What is the oldest joke? That is the question that probably will never be known.

For it is likely that human beings were given to the casting of humorous things back in the days of caves and of stone implements. Theorists are of the opinion that they jested one another in matters of personal appearance, to begin with.

And while the human sense of humor has been developing all these centuries it is amazing how old most of our supposedly modern jokes are, if they are taken up and traced back. Note this joke for instance:

Barber—How will you have your shave sir?

Customer—In silence.

Something familiar about that joke, isn't there? Heard it a line or two before, haven't you?

Well, it is nearly as old as history, if not older. Back in early Greece Archelaus is recorded as having sprung it on an unsuspecting barber. And doubtless it was a chestnut then. And this surely we have heard before:

Gnathene of Athens was offered some rather poor wine. When told that its age was sixteen years, Gny remarked: "It's pretty weak for its age."

A similar jest is related of Cleon. When told at a banquet that the wine he was drinking was forty years old Paternian said, "By my faith! it bears its age well."

And here is the classical form of the woman's age joke:

Cleero hearing the wife of a Roman patrician say that she was but thirty years old, said: "No doubt 'tis true, for it is twenty years now that I have heard you say it."

Just as good as ever is the irony of 2200 years ago:

The painter Apelles, who flourished in the times of Alexander, was shown a picture by an inferior artist who boasted of having sketched it out in an exceedingly short space of time. "Yes, I can see that very well," said Apelles, "but I am surprised that you did not make several other pictures exactly like this in the same space of time."

The Old "Last" Gag.

We are indebted, according to tradition, to this same Apelles for one of our common phrases. The painter had listened with patience and profit to a cobbler's criticism of the sandals in a picture. But when the cobbler began to enlarge the field of his criticism to other parts of the painting he received this rebuke from Apelles: "Shoemaker, stick to your last."

In "where the shoe pinches," the ancient rendering took this form:

There was general disapproval of the actions of a Roman citizen who had divorced his chaste, rich and beautiful wife. "But," said he, pointing to his foot, "there is a shoe, well made and brand new; no one but myself knows where it pinches."

As today, in the days gone by the doctors were made the target of the jester's fling:

Pausanias, the Spartan General, was asked by a physician how it was that he was never ill, and exultantly answered: "Because I never consult you."

At another time Pausanias said that the best physician was the one who dispatched his patients with the least possible suffering.

Pausanias strongly disapproving of a certain physician and his methods, and berating him in no mild terms, was reminded by a friend that as he had never consulted that particular doctor, how could he be so sure of his statements. Pausanias answered: "Well, had I consulted him would I be living today?"

Here is a legend that is also told of an American Indian and the Governor General of an early settlement:

A Scythian King, seeing a man during a snow storm entirely nude, asked him if he were not cold. "Are you," responded the man "is your face cold?" "No," answered the King. "Well, I am face all over," was the naked man's rejoinder.

Of law and the "law's delays" these tales are recorded:

A woman vainly pleading her case many times before Philip of Macedonia received at every refusal the reply that he "had not the time." At last her patience gave out and she said to him, "Then cease to reign." The monarch, feeling that he had deserved this rebuke, immediately listened to her and rendered the justice that her case merited.

Anacharsis, the Scythian philosopher, speaking of the laws of Solon, said: "They were like the web of a spider, very good for holding the weak, but allowing the strong to escape."

Ever Hear This One?

A petty thief was being led to prison. Diogenes said to him: "Fool, why didn't you rob on a grand scale, then it would have been you that would be sending others to prison."

The absurd sight of a person clothed or equipped with something all out of proportion to his size, always gives

rise to a smile if not to some jocose remark. One commonplace jest is the one about the small boy wearing a very large hat: "Hey, hat! Where are you going with that boy?" With the orator Cleero the jest took this form:

One day, seeing his short-statured son-in-law wearing a long sword, he cried out: "Who, I ask, has attached my son-in-law to that sword?"

Of a distinctly antique flavor are these two tales of philosophers:

Archytas, the Pythagorean philosopher, on his return from afar, found his fields in a very poor condition. They became so through the negligence of the steward. He said to him: "I'd give you a pretty good drubbing if I were not in such a passion."

A similar incident is told of Plato, who, provoked by the misbehavior of a slave, said to his nephew, who was standing by:

"Beat that slave, I am in too furious temper to do it."

Ancient writings are rich in legends of Dionysius the Elder, tyrant of Syracuse. He wrote poems and tragedies. Once he sentenced Philoxene to hard labor in the quarries for daring to criticize a poetical composition from the royal hand. Dionysius after a time sent to Philoxene and had read to him the second time this poem. The first few lines Philoxene listened with patience, but the reading had not gone much further before he rose and dashed for the door. When asked where he was going, he exclaimed: "Back to the quarries, your majesty."

At a banquet Dionysius, wishing to affront Plato, placed him last at the table. He then said to his courtiers: "Plato will probably have much to say to us when he returns to Athens." "I hope," Plato rejoined, "never to be so at a loss for a subject of conversation that I should find it necessary to speak of you."

Dionysius repeatedly refused to grant Artispippus a favor. At last Artispippus humbly prostrated himself at the feet of the King and renewed his supplication. The philosopher was reproached for this servile groveling. "You should not blame me, but Dionysius, who has ears in his feet," was his apology.

One day Artispippus asked Dionysius for money. "But," said Dionysius, "I've always heard it said that a philosopher never has need of anything." "We will discuss that point, sire, but first give me some money," Artispippus said. The request accorded to, the philosopher immediately ejaculated, "Now, you see, sire, I have need of nothing."

At a call to arms in Sparta, Androclides, who was lame, offered himself as a recruit. When refused on account of his crippled legs, he exclaimed, "I thought you were looking for men to fight, not to run away."

The Retort Discourteous.

There was a stranger in Sparta who prided himself on his skill in standing for a long time on one leg. One day when he was showing off his little trick, he called to a Spartan: "Hey! You can't do this." "No, but every goose can," was the quick rejoinder.

One of the followers in the train of Antigonus, a general under Alexander, was a poet named Antagoras. In the camp one day the poet, cooking some eels, was surprised by Antigonus, who said: "Don't think, poet, that Homer when he was commemorating the exploits of Agamemnon would be spending his time cooking eels?" And thou, sire," the poet replied, "believeest thou that Agamemnon in the midst of his exploits would be asking if anyone in his camp were cooking eels?"

At a banquet a Lacedaemonian, when seated at the very last place at the table, said: "You have found a way of making this place, henceforth, a place of honor."

Theocritus, the pastoral poet, asked a schoolmaster who read very badly why he didn't teach geometry. "Because I do not know that science." "Then why do you teach reading?" Theocritus asked.

King Antigonus, asked by a cynic for a drachme, said: "That is hardly a gift that a King should offer." The cynic replied: "Then give me a talent."

"But is that a gift that a cynic should accept?" was the King's response.

Notwithstanding their age and the quaintness of the humor, the fun in these remaining specimens of classical wit is clearly discernable.

A fighter in the arena after ten unsuccessful attempts to give the bull a mortal thrust was presented with a champion's wreath by the Emperor Gallienus, announcing his reason through the herald: "That it was a difficult thing to do, miss the bull so many times in succession."

Diogenes, when asked what was the most suitable hour for dining, said: "If you are rich, when you please; if you are poor, when you can."

This same cynical philosopher, entering a bath in which the water was extremely foul, remarked that he did not see why the people who bathed there shouldn't wash themselves first.

Two youths, rivals for the favors of Gnathene, fell to settling their differ-

ences with a fight. To the one getting the worst of the affair Gnathene cheerfully cried: "Courage, it's not a matter of who is the strongest, but of who is the richest."

Gnathene was dining with her friend, Dexitheo, who during the progress of the meal laid aside all the dainty morsels for her mother. Gnathene ironically observed: "It seems that I would have fared better had I dined with your mother instead of with you."

To some ambassadors when they had finished reading a long, wearisome harangue, Cleomenes, King of Sparta, said:

"I cannot recall the first part of your discourse, and in consequence I do not understand the second part, and as for the conclusion I disapprove of it entirely."

One on Rich Husbands.

In choosing a husband for his daughter, the Spartan, Admiral Eurybiades, chose one of a good reputation rather than another who was very rich, as he preferred a man without THREE—LAUGHING AT

a fortune to a fortune without a man. Simonides, the lyric poet, said that he had often repented of having spoken; but never repented of having held his tongue.

Alebiades cut off the tail of a fine dog which he had accompanying him on all his promenades. Some friends told him that all Athens was joking about the absurdity of the spectacle of a magnificent dog minus a tail. "That is exactly what I wish," said Alebiades. "I want the people to so concern themselves about the dog that they will have no time to conjure up stenderous things to say about me."

Philip of Macedonia, after the battle of Chaeronea, where he defeated the Greeks, sent a boasting and insolent letter to the King of Sparta. Archidamus, the King, sent this caustic rejoinder: "If thou wilt measure thy shadow, thou wilt find that it hath not increased in size since thy victory."

Ambassadors from a besieged town were treating with Alexander on the terms of surrender. Alexander ordered that Acuphis, the eldest of the Ambassadors, should be the Governor of the town, and that he should send immediately as hostage 100 of the best citizens. Acuphis then smilingly observed: "Sire, I could govern better if thou wouldst permit me to send thee 100 of the worst citizens instead of 100 of the best."

Nor is the vogue of that most modern of all forms of humor, the answer to "foolish questions," as modern as it seems. Carpathius, on coming out of the theatre, was asked if he had been in the theater to see the spectacle. "No," said Carpathius with a frown, "I was playing tennis in the orchestra."

## WOMAN OUTDRIVES TWO SPEED FIENDS

OAKLAND, November 19.—A woman aided Corporal James Flynn and Patrolman Keefe this afternoon to capture two speeding motorcyclists who failed to stop when the officer shouted to them at Seventh avenue and Fourteenth street. It was an exciting time for all concerned.

When the speedburners answered the officers' commands with derisive laughs and kept on their way, a woman who had witnessed the proceeding stopped her automobile and said: "You can have my machine if you want. Jump in and we'll follow them."

The officers did, and a merry chase ensued. The woman showed herself an intrepid driver by sending the big car along at about sixty miles an hour, which proved too fast for the motorcyclists, and they were overhauled and placed under arrest at Forty-second avenue. They are Otto Young and Leslis Lansing, a chauffeur and machinist, respectively, and they were booked at the City Prison on a charge of violating the speed ordinance, later being released on \$2 bail each.

## BIG FEET; NORMAL MINDS.

PARIS, November 1.—That the majority of normal-minded men have big feet and most normal-minded women small feet is the latest scientific discovery announced to the world by the Paris Academy of Sciences. It comes from Professors Macauliff and Marie, who, for several months, have been measuring the feet of the French people in all walks of life.

They found that eighteen out of every hundred soldiers were small-footed and only twenty-four of every one hundred weak-minded men big-footed. On the other hand they found that only twenty-three of every one hundred normal women were large-footed, while only eighteen were small-footed.

This is considered to confirm the ancient theory that woman is man's equal, for the reason that she is his exact opposite.

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