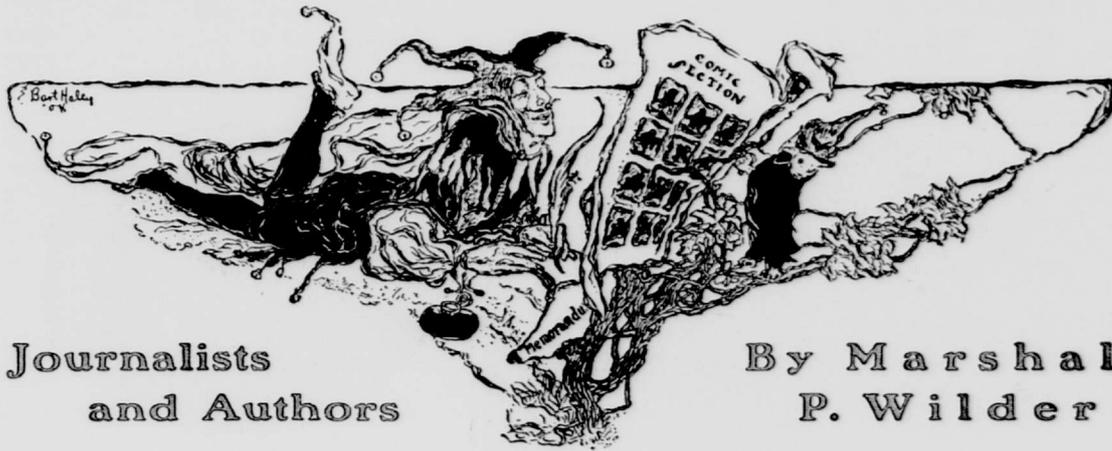


# SUNNY SIDE of THE STREET



## Journalists and Authors

By Marshall  
P. Wilder

WHEN you say "journalist" to a man of my profession, or of any other that devotes its time and wits to the task of amusing and entertaining people, it is taken for granted that you mean "critic," and that "critic" in turn means "faultfinder." This is extremely unfair to journalists in general and critics in particular, for not all journalists are critics, nor all critics faultfinders. Run over the names of all the critics you've heard of here or in London or Paris—critics dramatic, musical and literary—and you will discover to your surprise that those who are best-known and have most influence are those who are quickest to praise and slowest to find fault.

As a proof of it, and how it strikes the men and women most concerned, both in pocket and pride, is the following: Almost every new play, concert or entertainment of any kind tries to give its first real performance in New-York. It may endeavor to get some money out of the later rehearsals by giving a few performances out of town—"trying it on the dog" is the name for this sort of thing—but New-York is trusted to set the pace, and this is what follows:

On the day on which New-York newspapers containing a report of the performance reach any city or town where the same attraction has been booked conditionally, or where managers or entertainment committees have heard enough in advance about it to want to hear more, there is a run on news stands for certain of these papers. I won't indicate them closer than to say that they are not those sheets which support the brilliant chaps who skilfully ride hobbies of their own, or who are most skilled at vivisection and eviscerating a playwright and splitting each particular hair of an actor, singer or entertainer. The papers for which there is a general demand are those which tell whether the performance was good of its kind, specify the kind and tell how the audience regarded it.

At the end of the third act of a new play in New-York a noted critic was buttonholed in the lobby by a clubman who had a friend in the cast and asked for his opinion.

"It's a success—a great success!" was the reply.

"Good! I'm so glad you like it."

"Like it? My dear fellow, I never was worse bored in my life. I'd rather have heard 'Julius Caesar' done by a lot of high-school boys. But that has nothing to do with it. If pieces were written and played for me and my kind, they'd have to charge ten dollars a ticket to get money enough to pay for the gas and music. Plays are made for audiences; this audience likes this play—likes it immensely—so other audiences will like it too, and if I don't say so in our newspaper to-morrow morning I deserve to be bounced and have this week's salary docked."

Of course it is a critic's business to see defects and call attention to them. When he does so he confers a favor upon the performer, who generally is so absorbed in what he is doing that he doesn't know what he is leaving undone or doing badly; but the faults of stage or platform can't be remedied with a sledge-hammer or a double-bladed dagger—not even if you give the dagger a turn or two after you have jabbed it in. A prominent critic said to me:

"I don't criticize a play according to my own feelings and tastes. Although I've a good opinion of my own personal standard of judgment, I don't believe the people collectively would give a snap of the finger for it. I simply try to ascertain the opinion

of the audience and express it for the benefit of the people of whom audiences are made. I greatly dislike such players as—(mentioning a popular actor and actress) "but who cares what I think about them? I would not be fair to try to impress my dislikes upon others, unless I chance upon some one who takes the stage seriously; and there are only two classes who do this: conceited critics and actors who don't get their pay. Fortunately I know few professional people; if I knew more I should become insane through trying to dissociate their personality from their work. It is bad to know too much about anybody or anything, if you don't want to throw the world out of joint. Except in questions of morals and manners, 'where ignorance is bliss 'tis folly to be wise.'"

Did you ever hear how Horace Greeley once got cold feet? A friend—one of the wise, observant, upsetting kind of friends—called on Greeley one cold winter day and found the great journalist with a favorite book in his hand, a beatific smile on his face, and his feet over the register. The visitor had previously been through the building and learned that the furnace had gone wrong and been removed, the cold-air flue could not be closed, and zero air was coming through all the registers, so he said:

"Mr. Greeley, why do you keep your feet there? There is no heat—only cold air is coming up."

Greeley tumbled out of his chair, and in a drawing voice replied: "Why didn't you let me alone? I was entirely comfortable, but now I'm near you I'm frozen."

Speaking of draws, I wish that all my readers could have heard Mark Twain's voice as he told me a tale of juvenile woe. I had asked him if he could remember the first money he had ever earned.

"Yes," he said. "It was at school. All boys had the habit of going to school in those days, and they hadn't

any more respect for the desks than they had for the teachers. There was a rule in our school that any boy marring his desk, either with pencil or knife, would be chastized publicly before the whole school or pay a fine of five dollars. Besides the rule, there was a ruler—I knew it because I had felt it—it was a hard one too.

"One day I had to tell my father that I had broken the rule, and had to pay a fine or take a public whipping, and he said:

"Sam, it would be too bad to have the name of

Clemens disgraced before the whole school, so I'll pay the fine. But I don't want you to lose anything, so come upstairs.' I went upstairs with father, and he was for giving me. I came downstairs with the feeling in one hand and the five dollars in the other, and decided that as I'd been punished once, and got used to it, I shouldn't mind taking the other licking at school. So I did, and kept the five dollars. That was the first money I ever earned."

This unexpected shift of the moral point of view is peculiar to boys. James Whitcomb Riley, author of no end of things humorous and pathetic, told me

of a small boy who astonished his mother one night by saying his prayers in German. When reproved, he said: "Oh, that was a joke."

"You must not joke with Heaven," said his mother severely.

"Oh, the joke isn't on Heaven; it's on you," was the reply.

Another small friend of Mr. Riley's jumped quickly into bed one cold night. His mother said: "Johnny, haven't you forgotten something?"

"No, mamma," was the reply. "I've made up my mind not to say my prayers to-night or to-morrow night or the night after, and then if I have good luck I won't say them any more at all."

My friend Frank Doubleday, a member of a publishing firm, would rather get a laugh on some one than get a record-breaking novel. He is a fine, tall, handsome fellow, and like many another handsome man who is really manly; but he is careless of his dress. Going through Greenwich-st. one day, near the ferries and steamboat landings, his rural appearance and manner attracted the attention of one of the "bunco" or "green-goods" gentry, who accosted him with: "Why, Mr. Brown, I'm very glad to see you."

"But my name isn't Brown," said Doubleday, in his most innocent manner.

"What? Aren't you Mr. Brown of Paterson?"

"No, my name is Marshall P. Wilder."

"Oh, you go to blazes!" growled the bunco-man with a glare.

To get back to journalists, with whom I began, I

believe I have said elsewhere that Henry Watterson is the most quoted editor in the United States. Yet a lot of his best things do not appear over his signature; he says so many that only a phonograph could keep tally of them. One evening at the Riggs House in Washington he found his friend Colonel Dick

Wintersmith, the poet lobbyist, in a gastronomic quandary, for the Colonel longed for a dinner of beef-steak and onions, but dreaded to carry the perfume of onions in his breath.

Watterson said: "Colonel Dick, I'll tell you how to avoid it."

"Do!"

"Why, go to John Chamberlin's for your beefsteak and onions—when you get your bill it will take your breath entirely away."

Opie Read, editor and author, frequently appears on the platform, to the delight of everyone who listens to him. One night he was greatly puzzled, for although his audience laughed heartily no one applauded. He learned afterward that he had been engaged to entertain the inmates of a home for disabled railway employees, and his audience was composed of switchmen, each of whom had lost an arm, perhaps two. He got a laugh even on one of the dreadful eating-houses peculiar to some railroad stations. Most of his fellow passengers were commercial travelers, and knew by experience what to expect at such places, so they got off of the train with sullen looks, as if sorry rather than glad that they were to dine, and their complainings began before they reached the table. A negro was walking to and fro on the station platform ringing a dinner bell, and near him was a small dog howling so piteously that the colored man stopped and exclaimed:

"What's you hollerin' for? You don't have to eat here."

My friend Quimby of "The Detroit Free Press" tells of "meeting up" with two strangers who became so friendly that soon the three were introducing themselves.

"I'm from Detroit," said Quimby to one. "Where are you from?" he asked earnestly.

"Boston," was the reply. The Bostonian turned inquiringly to the third, who said:

"I'm from Pawtucket; now, blame you, laugh!"

I am indebted to hundreds of critics and other journalists for kind things they have printed about me. As to authors, one of them saved my life a few years ago, and this is how it occurred:

I had rooms on Thirty-fourth-st., New-York, next door to the late Laurence Hutton, author of many well-known books. One night, on returning home late, I discovered that I had neglected to take my keys, so

I was practically locked out. I rang the bell, but no one responded. Suddenly I noted that lights were still burning in Hutton's house and I recalled that he had given a dinner that night to Edwin Booth, the tragedian. Hutton was the most obliging neighbor

(Continued on page 12)

