

Jerome K. Jerome tells the 13 original jokes

George Ade edits them down and finds only 4. And then Mr. Jerome edits Mr. Ade's humor down to no joke at all.



GEORGE ADE

JEROME K. JEROME TRYING TO THINK OF A 14th JOKE.

It is an age of disillusion. One by one our ideals which have become idols are torn from us by the ruthless and relentless hand of scientific discovery. Science has discovered that no one knows enough to go in out of the rain until he is 55, and then proved that all of us should be chloroformed by the time we are 40. It has discovered that man must eat, to live, and then proved that there is no food he can eat and live. It has discovered that there is nothing new under the sun, and then, with new fangled telescopes, proved that there is nothing new above it either.

All these things we have borne with patience, because there was nothing else to do, consoling ourselves meanwhile that we might still have our joke. But now even that boon is taken from us, and what is worse, it is shown that, as a matter of fact, we never really did have our joke—it was always somebody else's. Science again! It is discovered that there have been only thirteen original jokes and proved that all the rest are merely variations of these fateful thirteen.

In the present instance science promotes its publicity through the mediumship of Jerome K. Jerome, the English author. It is he, traitor to his craft, as no doubt some of the more serious humorists will declare him, who has authentically informed us that our well beloved funny men are no more than a set of antiquarians, who merely burrow and borrow from the ancients for the quizz and wheeze which fall from tongue or pen with so much unctious. Now we know why all our humorists have such a melancholy air in telling their jokes. It is conscience.

Only Thirteen

Scarcely had Mr. Jerome set foot upon the wharf which juts out from our hospitable shores than he broke the sad news to the awaiting group of "men," reporters, representatives and commissioners (the titles being regulated by the newspapers employing them), of the daily press. Without wasting time in detailing the arduous labors of research necessary to make the discovery, he plunged at once into an announcement of its result.

"A scientist has discovered," said Mr. Jerome, "that there are only thirteen original jokes. There are thirty-five variations of each of these jokes, and in return you may have thirty-three variations of each varied specimen. The longevity of jokes has long had the admiration (and sometimes other things) of all men, but it has remained for science to show their numerical strength, or perhaps I should say weakness."

That was all. No ceremonies, no

face of the laughmakers with the utmost simplicity. Not even a titter signified that the end had come. Mr. Jerome refused to divulge the name of the scientist who had discovered the appalling truth, although he vehemently denied that it was the editor of London Punch. Likewise, probably for commercial reasons, being a humorist himself, he refused to furnish a list of the thirteen original jokes. He stated, however, that neither Simeon Ford nor Chauncey Depew had one of his credit.

The List and Examples

Later, however, a statement was obtained, giving the fateful thirteen, which would look like "23" to the aspiring humorist.

"In presenting the list," said the humorist, "I will not take the time to give the details of each joke's career through the ages, though I assure you they are most interesting. I will merely give them in the order of their seniority, with the approximate of birth and classification. I can assure you that all of them are alive and flourishing, but that, fortunately, the copyright on most of them has run out."

Here is the list:

1. Conundrum variety. (Dark Ages.)
2. Q. Why does a chicken cross the road? A. To get on the other side.
3. Note.—This joke dates from the Mammoth period, and in its first form the animal mentioned was a megapharhis, since extinct. At its disappearance chicken was substituted.
4. Mother-in-law variety. (Dates from two weeks after institution ceremony of marriage.)
5. Jones—You look happy, Brown.
6. Brown—Yes; just lost my mother-in-law.
7. Jones—Well, it's hard to lose your mother-in-law.
8. Brown—Hard? It's almost impossible.
9. Married life variety. (Dates from three weeks after institution of ceremony of marriage.)
10. First Tourist—Is your wife traveling with you?
11. Second Tourist—No, I'm traveling for pleasure.
12. Owing money variety. (Thirty-two minutes after money was invented.)
13. Jones (knocking at Smith's door at midnight)—Smith!
14. Smith (awakening)—What is it?
15. Jones—I can't pay you that money tomorrow morning. I couldn't sleep till I had told you.
16. Smith—I wish you hadn't. Now I can't sleep.

The Love Variety

1. Love variety. (Origin obscure.)
2. Brown—Love is blind.
3. Green—The neighbors ain't!
4. Woman variety. (Origin supposed to be with Adam, but no positive proof.)

"A woman is only a woman, but a good cigar is a smoke."

7. Gambling variety. (442 B. C., Babylon.)

8. First Babylonian—How did you come out in the dice game last night, Ptolemy?

9. Second Babylonian—Badly. I lost 46,234 pieces of gold and two pieces of silver, and the worst part of it was that one of the pieces of silver was cash.

10. Whisky variety. (Twenty-four hours after the discovery of whisky.)

11. "Don't despise a thing because it's small—a quart jug can hold more than a man."

12. Irish variety. (Time of St. Patrick.)

13. Clerk (calling to proprietor)—Is Clancy good for a drink?

Proprietor—Has he had it?

Clerk—He has.

Proprietor—He is.

14. Hebraic variety. (742 B. C., Jerusalem.)

15. First Citizen—Solomon, I hear you had a dreadful fire last Tuesday?

16. Second Citizen—No; next Thursday.

17. Ministerial variety. (Originated in Philadelphia. Copyright still controlled there.)

A minister was hit upon the cheek by an angry man. Mindful of the scriptural injunction, he turned the other cheek, whereupon the man hit that even a severe blow. Taking off his coat and frouncing the man severely, the minister remarked, "That's where the Bible stopped!"

18. Juvenile variety. (Very remote.)

19. First Boy—We've got a mansard roof on our house.

20. Second boy—That's nothing; we've got a mortgage on ours.

21. Weather variety. (Shrouded in obscurity, as discoverer was compelled to keep his name secret, for fear of assassination.)

"Is it hot (cold) enough for you?"

(Note—When thermometer is 90 degrees use "hot"; when zero, use "cold.")

An Expert Opinion

When George Ade was told of Mr. Jerome's statement his air of melancholy to a great extent vanished.

"Thirteen," he said brightly. "I had no idea there were so many as that. Just let me get a hold of that list, and we will see if the critics are right in saying that I'm all in."

When requested as a representative

of the humorist to examine the list and discuss it for the Herald readers, Mr. Ade again returned to the critics.

"I'll examine the list all right," he said, "and discuss it, but not as a humorist or as anything else. To tell you the truth, I do not know just what I am until I read the papers the day after the play of mine is produced, and seldom then. Out in Indiana, where I own a farm, they look on me as a dramatist, and in New York, where my plays are produced, they consider me a farmer. I would not mind being called the first Ade to the Melancholy—that could mean so many different things. But no one apparently ever thought of that but me. So we will dispense with titles and look over the list as private but public hearted citizens."

Mr. Ade's sprightly manner vanished as quickly as it had come, however, when his eye fell upon the representative jokes.

"I knew it was too good to be true," he said. "Mr. Jerome has made a mistake in listening to an English scientist, and we might have expected that he would be wrong on jokes. The first on the list—about the chicken, I mean—isn't a joke at all. Nobody ever laughed at it, and nobody ever knew of anybody who laughed at it, and a joke has to bring a laugh. It's merely an inquiry into the habits of the chicken, and as such only interesting to the colored races."

"That leaves us twelve, but only for a moment, for, although I am not a married man, some of my friends are, and I am reliably informed that, no mother-in-law can possibly be looked upon as a joke."

Cuts Down the List

"Number three we will let stay in, for although in some quarters it is contended that marriage is a serious thing, it is every day being considered more lightly. Any one who reads the newspapers knows that that is right. The fourth variety, however, will have to go. Owing money is not humorous; it's tragic. Anybody who does not believe that can experiment. Let him owe a little; he cannot pay and see if he finds any humorous relaxation in it. Owing is the next saddest thing to be owed, and that is the saddest thing in the world."

"Number five, the love variety, is all right," Mr. Ade said, "but when they love it their actions show it. I will also allow number six—the woman variety—a place in it. It is only fair to state, however, that I am scarcely competent to judge of this, as I am a bachelor. While all bachelors—permanent and periodical—look at the matter in this way, however, I have told me some of my married friends have told me I believe there may be another side to the question."

"As to the gambling variety, which he listed as number seven, I absolutely deny it admittance. There is nothing humorous about gambling. True, I never won a bet. I don't see what that has to do with it."

The whisky variety, number eight, is all right, however. It has been rightly called "the humorist's best friend"—the joke, not the whisky—and has stood by every professional laugh-maker—or, perhaps I should call them attempted laughmakers—loyally. That brings our list up to four and that's about all we can admit on it. Jokes are character studies and not jokes at all. The ministerial variety comes from Philadelphia, and nothing coming from Philadelphia can possibly be thought funny. As for number twelve, little boys are not a joke; they are a nuisance. The so-called weather variety, which is number thirteen, instead of inspiring laughter, has only excited people to crime.

"So you see, instead of thirteen original jokes we have only four. I knew your news was too good to be true. The only thing a humorist can do is to sit quiet until some Nansen or Peary of humor discovers a fifth, and with that to work on we can all get busy."

Back to Jerome

But Mr. Ade was not to have the last word. That lay with Mr. Jerome, who, after first baring the secrets of the jokesmith's trade to the world's eye, promptly set about to destroy it entirely. When told that Mr. Ade had edited the list of the fateful thirteen and left but four, Mr. Jerome went

him one, perhaps it would be better to say four, better and left none.

"It was not my list, but the scientist's," said Mr. Jerome. "I was only quoting him in saying that there are only thirteen original jokes. That is not my belief. I do not believe that there are any, though whether the people who read my books agree with me or not I am not prepared to state."

"The question can be easily settled by calm inquiry. What is a joke? You do not answer. Nobody can. Why? Because the joke is in the mind of the beholder, or the person who laughs."

"For example, I fall down stairs. You laugh heartily and consider it a great joke. Do I? Certainly not. Do I laugh? No; I swear. I do not mean by this that my idea of a joke is other people's troubles. I mean that it is the point of view—which, of course, must be individual—that makes the laugh."

"Take the four examples that Mr. Ade admits are jokes, and what do we find? The first is the married variety, when he himself says he is not married—if he were he never would admit it. I protest that marriage is no joke, and propose a test in the interest of science. Let Mr. Ade marry, as an experiment, and then, after the lapse of two years, announce whether it is funny or not. If his answer is affirmative, then I am proved wrong and there is a joke. If it is not, my theory is upheld; I am willing to abide by the result."

"Mr. Ade also contends that there is humor in love. Nothing of the kind. Apparently he does not know that the descendants of the brigands of old have all become florists or gone into the jewelry business. When he discovers this fact, he will change his mind."

"The sixth variety—the woman joke—is allowed in, though Mr. Ade himself confesses that it is possible, but it is not funny. He is right there. It is not. As a matter of fact, it is quite the reverse. If Mr. Ade will take my suggestion and marry he will agree with me. Every other married man does."

The Whisky Joke Last

"The remaining one, which is given a place on his list, is the whisky joke. I will admit that this has a more legitimate claim than any other. Every man has at some time or other come to the conclusion that whisky is a very amusing thing, but within the space of twelve hours, and usually much less, he has found that he was very much mistaken."

"The trouble with you Americans," continued Mr. Jerome, having disposed of Ade, and now taking us in a lump, "is that you are too anxious to laugh. I am quite certain that I will be only considered here as a funny man, though several people have told me that they thought I might not be. It is this passion of Americans for being considered funny that causes your slang, which, frankly, I consider an abomination. I do not believe that any one understands it now—I am certain they will not a hundred years hence."

"Whenever I ask any one the meaning of a slang phrase they answer me with another. It's most confusing. Only the other day I was discussing the simple life with a man who was almost an entire stranger. I remarked that with all your hurry I did not think you Americans accomplished any more than your leisurely forefathers. His reply was an entirely irrelevant remark regarding his inability to stand up. As we were not discussing the condition of his legs his assertion struck me as decidedly odd."

"Did he say 'I can't stand for that?'" was asked.

"That was his expression. When I showed solicitude as to his physical condition he grew red in the face, and somewhat holly told me to 'quit stringing,' whatever that may mean. Later I gathered that 'I can't stand for that' was a slang phrase. Naturally I asked the man to explain it. He said that it meant that he was from Missouri, which, as a biographical detail, was no doubt interesting, but as an explanation decidedly vague. When I discovered that the geographical allusion was also slang intended to explain the former I asked for further enlightenment. All the man did then was to wave his arms helplessly and repeat meaningless the number twenty-three, which was neither funny nor intelligent. America is at present passing through the slang stage. I hope it gets through quickly."

LIGHTER SIDE OF THINGS

Tristesse

If you were not away,
These trees, this south wind, and this dreary day
Would all be mad with joyous ecstasy,
But you are gone, so mourning, they
With me
Find bitter-sweet in idle fantasy.
How glad, how mad, how gay,
If you were not away!
—Thomas S. Jones, Jr., in Lippincott's.

SOPHISTICATION

Once the horse of the road wheel and tumbled his load
At the sight of a cyclist a wheel
Now the hobbin is rare who will kick up a scare
At a fire-colored automobile.

Once the clumsy balloon as it soared to the moon
Alarmed all the birds on the fly;
Now the creature's awing quite contentedly sing
When a neat little airship goes by.

And the fish of the sea, now as tame as can be,
On diving-bells tranquilly gloat,
All competition forgot—and the sea-horse shies not
At the president's submarine boat.

For fish, flesh or fowl cannot set up a howl;
So, bowed to the natural plan,
They steady their nerves to the curious
Of that curious butt-in called Man.
—Wallace Irwin in New York Globe.

The Vicar's Bitter Jest

The usually peaceful parish of Thorn-ton in pastoral Leicestershire, England, has worked itself up into a ferment over the vicar's action in allowing sheep to graze in the churchyard, and the vicar has pointed out in a letter to his people his undoubted legal rights over the herbage of the churchyard, as well as his rights to feel the timber that may be growing there, for the repair of the church or the parsonage house. Unfortunately for the general harmony, he adds: "A parishoner has a right to be buried in the churchyard. Please tell those who are so anxious about their rights that I will gladly bury them all."—Buffalo Commercial.

The Naked Umbrella

Dorothy is a sweet little maid of two and a half. Her father never carries a cane, and when a caller came in with one one day, she was observed standing before it rapt in contemplation.

"Well, Dorothy," said her mother, "what's that?" Dorothy looked up with a puzzled expression. "Umbrella without any clothes on," said she.—Lippincott's Magazine.

OUTCLASSED

She—Father's company made three engines last week.
He—That's nothing. I made a train in five minutes the other day.



HIS TIP.
Porter—Don't I get er up, sah?
Mr. Wise—Yes; keep out of Wall Street.