MARSHALL P. WILDER'S FUNNIEST STORIES

Marshall P. Wilder When Somebody Started to Tell an Old One.

TO say bluntly that Marshall P. Wilder, who died a few days ago, made more theatre-goers laugh than any other humorist of the last decade would be stating the simple truth. A month ago that statement might have been looked upon as a press notice, but now it goes as a tribute to the ability, perseverance and optimism of the little dwarf whose humor has brightened the whole world. England knew him as well as America did, and he toured the globe several times.

He was eminently successful on the stage, and when away from the footlights he made it his business to keep everyone around him in good humor. At the end of every letter, and on every photograph he autographed, he never failed to sign himself "Merrily Yours." And he was not always feeling so merry at that. Nature, as Wilder used to say himself, was not in particularly good mood when she made him. He was a dwarf and a hunchback and suffered considerably from physical ills. But the broad smile never came off. It was as if he handed Nature the laugh and said, "What do I care if you have handicapped me this way. I'll do more good and bring more sunshine into your world than most folks upon whom you have lavished your favors."

And he did.

He billed himself as "The Prince of Entertainers and the Entertainer of Princes." And while some performers took exceptions to that classification, Wilder always delivered the goods.

You have heard him tell some of these stories before, but they will bear repeating.

The Johnny's Point of View.

"THERE is a good deal of talk about the English being slow to appreciate a joke. I have not found that to be the case at all, although one Englishman did come to me for an explanation after I had made the remark that 'I dreamed one night that I was dead, but it was so hot that I woke up.'

"'I beg your pardon, Mr. Wilder,' he said, 'but it must be deuced hot in your country.'

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Afraid He Would.

A FRIEND of mine was raffling off a clock. He approached an Irishman and urged him to take a chance on the timepiece.

"No," said the Irishman, "Oi'll not take it. Oi hov no use for a clock and wouldn't know what to do with it if Oi had it."

"Oh, never mind," came the reply in a reassuring voice. "Take a chance; you may not get it."

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Nat Goodwin Turns the Tables.

THE little laughmaker made a big English hit by telling a story that ran like this:

"Oh, yes, that reminds me; the night before I left New York I went to my phone and rang up Central. Ting a ling. 'What number?' 'Gimme the Hoffman House bar.' 'Ting a ling; hello.'

"'Hello, is that the Hoffman bar?'

"'Yes.'

"'Is Mr. Nat Goodwin there?'

"'Yes.'

"'That's very strange! Good by.'"

This little tale excited the British risibles to the point of hysterical hilarity, and Marshall never failed to score with it, especially if Nat Goodwin were one of the party.

The humor of the thing rather palled upon Nat, for one evening at the Eccentric Club, Nat's turn as a raconteur preceded Marshall's, and our flamboyant haired comedian told a little story himself.

"Ah, yes, that reminds me. The night before I left New York I called up Central on the telephone and asked for the Hoffman House bar. 'Ting a ling a ling. Is that the Hoffman House bar?'

"'Yes.'

"'Is Marshall P. Wilder there?'

"'Yes.'

"'Is he buying anything?'

"'Yes.'

"'That's very strange! Good by.'"

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He Made the Name Famous.

AN Englishman was walking along one of the principal thoroughfares of Washington and saw a curly haired old negro putting in coal in one of the cellars of one of the Government buildings. The negro worked away industriously.

"What is your name?" asked the interested foreigner at length.

The negro bowed in a pleasant way.

"My name's George Washington, sah, at your service."

"Washington, Washington," muttered the foreigner musingly. "It seems to me I have heard that name before."

"Shouldn't wonder, sah," rejoined the negro in a delighted tone. "I've been here doing this sort of thing for the last ten years."

* * *

Sounded Like It.

A LABORER who stuttered badly was arrested for some misdemeanor and was taken before the magistrate.

"What is your name, prisoner?" asked the judge severely.

The prisoner screwed up his mouth and began.

"S-s-s-s-s-st-ep"——

The magistrate broke in.

"I am asking you what your name is."

Again the prisoner started in.

"S-s-s-s-s-st-ep"——

Whereupon the magistrate lost his patience and turned to the policeman who had brought the prisoner in.

"What is this prisoner charged with, officer?"

The cop saluted and said,

"Begorra, Oi don't know, but Oi should think it was sody water."

* * *

An Obligation.

ONCE I attended the Mikado's birthday party. Everybody has to wear a uniform, and if you have no uniform you must wear a plug hat. I got a hat that came down over my ears. Had to pry it off when it came time to salute the Mikado. It reminded me of the story of the fellow who tipped his hat to a pretty girl. His friend said, "Who is that?"

"A friend of my brother," he said, "and this is my brother's hat, so I have to tip it."

Then Time to Stir.

THOMAS EDISON once set out to invent a perfect coffee machine suitable to use in camps or on hunting trips. Asking the advice of a former guide as to the requirements of such a thing, the man, who was a Swede, gave him this recipe:

"Der ban only von vay to cook coffee. Tak von trip into voods up on Flambeau River; build fire vid pitchpine knots; put von quart water and two handful coffee in coffee pot, and sit on cover so she can't boil over. Ven cover get too hot for pants coffee she done."

* * *

Complete the Illusion.

A MATTER of etiquette will often puzzle people, like the young lady who at a breakfast party sat next to Mr. Joseph Choate. She had the misfortune to spill an egg on the floor, and was greatly embarrassed.

"Oh, Mr. Choate," she whispered, appealing to his greater experience in social matters, "what shall I do? I've dropped an egg on the floor."

"Well, if I were you," said the irrepressible Mr. Choate, who could not resist the opportunity, "if I were you, I think I'd cackle."

* * *

Jokes On Himself.

MANY jokes have been played upon me by intimate friends. I remember Elbert Hubbard, the well-known American journalist, once took me from Chicago to New York on a half-ticket. When the conductor came round and Elbert handed him the tickets, he looked at me, then at Hubbard, and said:

"How old is your son?"

"He is seven, right enough," answered Hubbard, and gazed out of the window indifferently.

"He needs a shave," remarked the conductor, as he punched the tickets and started on.

Hubbard stopped the conductor. "If you think the little fellow is over age," he said, "why don't you ask me to pay full fare for him?"

"Well," he said, "it is like this. I thought that any one who had as much cheek as you two have should be rewarded."

But it was carrying a joke too far, I thought, at the time—although it made me chuckle afterward—when Elbert walked into the dining car, tied a napkin under my chin, lifted me into a high chair, and ordered a waiter to give me a bowl of bread and milk, while he sat opposite and ordered fried chicken and everything nice on the bill-of-fare.

* * *

Not for Him.

TALKING of labor movements and Socialism, I like that story about the Irishman who was looking for a job. He saw a sign in a bookseller's window, "Porter Wanted." "That'll just suit me," he said, and entered the shop, when he was confronted by another, "Dickens' Works—all this week—for $10."

The Irishman read off the sign without any stops or commas. "'Dickens works all this week for $10,' does he? Well, be jabers, let him. I'm a union man."

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Scotch Treat.

A MAN dropped into a cafe one afternoon and saw his Scotch friend Sandy standing at the bar indulging in "a lone one." He walked up to the bar and greeted Sandy.

"Will you have another one with me?"

"No, thank you," said Sandy, "but you can pay for this one if you will."

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Two for Five.

MARK TWAIN was fond of telling a story against himself, and I think the one which tickled me most is a tale of juvenile woe which Mark related to me some years ago. I had asked Mark if he could remember the first money he had ever earned.

"Yes," he said. "It was at school, and a very painful recollection it is, too. There was a rule in our school that any boy marking his desk either with pencil or knife would be chastised 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 darned 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 came down with a bad feeling and the five dollars, and decided that as I had been punished once and got used to it, I wouldn't mind taking the other licking at school. So I did, and kept the five dollars. That was the first money I ever earned."

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Somebody Left the Door Open.

AMERICAN people, I might mention, have a very high appreciation of the humor of Englishmen, and have been specially tickled by a story my friend, Colonel Cody, used to tell. He said that some years ago an Englishman who had never been in the West before was his guest. They were riding through a Rocky Mountain canyon one day, when suddenly a tremendous gust of wind came swooping down upon them and actually carried the Englishman clear off the wagon seat. After he had been picked up he combed the sand and gravel out of his whiskers and said:

"I say! I think you overdo ventilation in this country!"

Wilderisms

It is true that nature put a couple of feet under me, but she left a couple of feet off at the top.

"The subway is certainly a great convenience. It comes in mighty handy sometimes. It allows you to get to Brooklyn without being seen."

Wilder always claimed that it was harder to make the English mind see the point of a story than the American.

"For instance," he said, "I never tell them a veiled story on Saturday night, because I do not want to work them too hard on Sunday."

Of course, all of my stories do not appeal to everybody, but a few of my stories do seem to hit everybody alike, such as the story about the Irishman who aimed at a bird and hit a frog. Picking it up he looked surprised, but said:

"Well, anyhow, I knocked the feathers off of it."

At a time when the Gerry Society was particularly active, a friend of Wilder's saw him hiding in a doorway in Times Square. "I'm afraid the Gerry Society 'll get me," he explained.

When I left school the question was, what was I to do. I couldn't be a prizefighter, so I became a stenographer.

* * *

Couldn't Lose That.

A DARKY who was fishing had a little boy about two years old at his side, and as he threw the line into the water the little chap fell in also. The old darky plunged in and brought out the youngster, squeezed him out, and stood him up to dry. A clergyman who came along happened to see him, and said,

"My man, you have done nobly—you are a hero. You saved that boy's life."

"Well," said the darky, "I didn't do that to sabe his life; he had de bait in his pocket."

* * *

Saved a Lot of Time.

WHEN I was in Japan and China I went through the prisons and the courts. Funny about the Chinese. Every ten miles you strike a new dialect. When they arrest a Chinaman it takes three or four interpreters to find out what his offense is. I saw one fellow dragged in by the queue. The judge asked what the charge was. The first interpreter told the second, the second told the third, the third told the fourth, and the fourth told the judge that the fellow had stolen a yellow dog.

"Well," said the judge, "I am glad it was not a black-and-tan."

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The Last Speck.

THERE has always been a discussion among the wise ones as to there being gold in the ocean; in fact, there have been companies formed to get it out of the ocean, and there are companies that get gold out of the passengers. There is one good thing about ocean travel—there is no dust.

After you get through tipping everything from the rudder to the bowsprit, you are entirely free from dust.

As I was getting off the boat a steward came at me with a whiskbroom. I said:

"There is no more dust on me."

He replied that there might be a little left.

"Well, try your luck," I said.

He got my car fare.

* * *

Taken at His Word.

ANOTHER President about whom many stories were told was Grover Cleveland. One which he enjoyed very much himself was that one time when he was out hunting he was overtaken by darkness, and coming to a fisherman's hut knocked at the door. The family had retired, but after repeated knockings a man put his head out of a window and asked:

"Who's there?"

"I am Grover Cleveland."

"Well, what do you want?"

"I want to stay here all night."

"All right, stay there."

He Knew.

ONE hears funny conversations on shipboard. One man said:

"Say, Bill, who is that homely woman on the other side of the deck?"

"That's my wife," he replied.

"Why, you're not looking."

"I don't have to."

* * *

On the High Seas.

THE young lady had her head on the rail, with a far-away look on her face, as if she would give up anything—just to get home. A young man was sitting by her side and his head fell in her lap.

"Madam," asked a steward, "shall I help your husband up?"

"He isn't my husband," she says wearily. "I don't know who he is—and I don't care."

* * *

This Is So Sudden.

A JUDGE in North Carolina was sentencing a big, loose-jointed negro who had been convicted of murdering another negro.

"George Earley," His Honor, said: "You have been found by a jury of twelve men, tried and true, to be guilty of murder in the first degree, for having killed, in cold blood, Moses Stackhouse, and it is the sentence of this Court that on the tenth day of August the Sheriff of Polk County take you to a place near the county jail and there hang you by the neck until you are dead, dead, dead! And may God have mercy on your soul. Have you anything to say for yourself?"

The negro shifted from one foot to the other and twisted and untwisted the old felt hat he held in his hands. All eyes in the courtroom were upon him. Finally, rolling his eyes up at the Judge, he said:

"Look y'here, Jedge, you-all don't mean this comin' August, does you?"

* * *

He Probably Did.

THE kind father took little Isadore to Coney Island. Little Issy was a very cross kid on the way down. The father tried to keep him quiet with an offer of pennies and one thing or another, but Issy yelled louder and louder. His father hit upon a new scheme.

"Look, Isadore, I vill take my hat und throw it oud der vindow und ven you vistle it vill come back."

The father kept putting the hat out and bringing it back with an air of mystery every time little Issy whistled. It worked wonders with Isadore's conduct, for he soon stopped crying, and was in a gay mood in a jiffy.

Finally, when the father wasn't looking, Isadore took the hat, held it out the window, and let it drop. The hat went sailing down into the dirt along the tracks. Isadore poked a scared face out after it, and then yelled:

"Fadder, der hat iss gone—VISTLE!"

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Badly Needed.

GENERAL SHERMAN, whom I had the honor to count among my closest friends, once told me a story about a chaplain in the army whose powers of conversation were so extraordinary he had brought to the mourners' bench almost every man in the battery. He said to the sergeant one day that he was much gratified at the results of his work, but there was one man, Johnson, who was a terrible blasphemer, on whom he could seem to make no impression.

"For goodness sake, chaplain, don't try to reform Johnson!" exclaimed the sergeant, aghast, "for if you do there won't be no one left to swear at the mules!"

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Ship Life.

YOU know in rough weather they build a fence round the table to keep the dishes down. I was just pursuing a piece of bread when the ship did a figure eight, and the lady opposite me got my bread, and I got her fish.

For the rest of the meal we fed each other.

I was getting them over the plate with an inshoot when she stole home on a wild pitch.

The day I was feeling the worst, the passengers asked me to get up a concert. I had gotten up everything else, so I said I would try.

We had a prima donna on board who was having her voice cultivated in Paris.

I guess she was going over to get it. I know she didn't have it with her.

She told me she had a wonderful voice, but people don't mind what they say on shipboard.

The night of the concert was rough, and she chose a fitting selection, "Rocked in the Cradle of the Deep." She was well started, when the ship gave a sudden halt and threw her under the table. I was accompanying her on the piano, and so had to follow her—and the piano followed me.

"Beg pardon," I said, "but is this a concert or a knockabout act?" She thought she was down for a solo, but she was down for an hour and ten minutes.

* * *

Natural Reply.

THE unexpected twist that is supposed to be peculiar to American humor seems to appear also in Scotch stories. For example, one which was told me by Mr. Andrew Carnegie of a Scotchman accosted by a military picket:

"Who are you?" challenged the soldier.

"I'm fine," answered Sandy. "Hoo's yersel'?"

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