WILDER WITH THE WITS.

He Heard All the Drolleries of Cleveland, Harrison and Depew.

How Great Men Make Fun—The Merry Little Man Writes About the Amenities of the Wine and Walnut Period.

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They do such things and they say such things—at dinners.

During the day after-dinner speakers make their livings with their heads, at night they make speeches with their hearts.

At big dinners you get souls set to Dvorak symphonics. The "inmost me" percolates through the diaphragm of the day-worker and drops out at the joint of the tongue—word by word. The smoke of the work-a-day world breaks up and scatters and disappears in a breeze of bon mots.

Imagine Chauncey M. Depew, president of the New York Central railroad, cracking jokes, even in his mind, during business hours. He dare not. They would pop like torpedoes all along the track and result finally in a general wreck from end to end of the Vanderbilt system.

No; President Depew thinks no trifles "during hours." If he do, Col. Duval smothers them in committee, and they die a deserved death.

But, oh, what a difference in the evening!

Dr. Depew then pulls down the blind on President Depew and gives Chauncey a chance. Thus at dinners, he comes to be "Our Chauncey."

Gen. Horace Porter has wit, humor, memory, but he lacks the magnetism and "go" of "Chauncey."

Dr. Depew's great power lies in his power for trotting up the right word at the winning time, as when at a late hour one evening he compared himself to the chamois because he found himself continually going from jag to jag.

Of all dinners, those of the Clover club stand unique for sparkle. It is hard to describe a Clover club dinner—might as well try to bottle up electricity. The company is a group of guyers. Moses P. Handy, a former president of the club—the gentleman who gave publicity to the world's fair—is a prince of guyers. By the by, he is the best dinner chairman I ever met.

One night at the Clover club in Philadelphia Handy arose, with Senator Jones, of Nevada, sitting near, and after having graphically outlined the attractive personality of that silver magnate by way of introduction, I noticed even that veteran of the upper house squirming and reddening in his seat, knowing well the guy guns that would be turned upon him as soon as he got upon his pins. He was visibly affected for the worse, but not more so than another gentleman, for no sooner had Handy worked the senator up almost to the starting point than he said: "Notwithstanding such seductive talent within reach, we can peg a hole higher by calling upon Col. Thomas Ochiltree, of Earth, who will now address you." It is needless to say that both gentlemen looked as if they had just been shot out by mistake from Zalinski's dynamite gun on the Nietheroy and missed the mark.

And it came to pass in that time that the said Ochiltree had had his leg broken by the Pennsylvania railroad. He was suing the railroad because his leg was broken—or he was broke—one or the other. The officials all knew of this, and yet loved him. One of these officials was present. Col. Ochiltree had been using crutches in order to keep the leg from healing while the suit was in progress. But it was foully suspected that he was merely doing the litigative limb. For one day, on seeing some pretty young lady friends across Chestnut street, he dropped his crutches, 'twas said, and went with a skip to greet them. When the colonel was called upon, the Pennsylvania officials remarked: Colonel, where are your crutches?"

"Under the table, where you will be before the dinner is over," and the scorer marked up a carom for the colonel against a goose-egg for the Pennsylvania potentate.

Among the gentlemen at that dinner were Charles Emory Smith, Gen. Magargee, Gov. Bunn, E. Burd Grubb, Edwin S. Stuart, John Russell Young, C. R. Deacon, A. K. McClure, James H. Heverin, Henry H. Bingham, Clayton McMichael, William M. Singerly, Frank Thomson, Albert G. Hetherington, J. William White and scores of famous guests from outside of Philadelphia.

Col. Ingersoll came in late, when Gov. Bunn, catching sight of him, exclaimed in the midst of the decorated and delicious surroundings: "Ah, colonel, this is heaven, no place for you here."

The colonel blushed up to where the roots of his hair ought to be, and was conspicuous for his silence, whether it was because he felt out of place in heaven, I don't know. He may go there yet in spite of himself.

Mr. Cleveland, also, was there. The guy was put out on him, but Mr. Cleveland was on his mettle and made one of the best speeches of his life.

Col. Cockerill came up for his share. But the colonel has been everything from drummer-boy in Sherman's army to editor in New York city, and, with all his modesty, is a match even for Handy.

Col. Cockerill is a dark horse for Depew's place as a dinner speaker, should Depew go first. But evidently the doctor is not anticipating any such thing. For at a press club dinner given to Cockerill five years ago Dr. Depew said in closing his remarks: "I trust that Col. Cockerill may enjoy a long life and that I may live to pronounce his funeral oration."

Senator Hill said a felicitous thing that night when in making the request to follow instead of preceed Dr. Depew on the programme, he remarked that "the state of New York ought not to overshadow the United States and he deferred to Mr. Depew." (Mr. Depew was then mentioned as a presidential possibility).

At a dinner given by W. J. Arkell to the newspaper men at Mt. McGregor it was understood that there should be no remarks except by President Harrison, who was the guest of honor, to be followed by some knick-knacks by myself.

I never enjoyed a dinner so little, though it was in the middle of the day. Up rose the president and made an impressive speech. The words kept buzzing in my ears, "Next comes his nibs; what'll he say. Oh, what'll he say!" In came Mt. Gregor. Then the president drifted to the death of Gen. Grant at that place—how eloquent he was on this point, but at the close. "All the air a solemn stillness held." Mirth of any kind was dead to the world.

Then came calls for me; but his nibs refused to get up. "You're a chump, said one friend." "What's the matter with you?" said another. After all was over the president approaching me said: "I didn't expect to speak of Gen Grant's death, but I knew your good taste would prevent you from saying anything of a jocular nature after I had done so."

By the bye! President Harrison could not be put down as a humorist, as I found out before the trip was ended. The party were going down the mountain to Saratoga in a special car. When walking down the aisle to where Mr. Harrison was sitting I said: "Mr. President, I am more than glad to have had you along on this jaunt. You will understand that a lot of people, a band of music and militia will be waiting to greet me at Saratoga. Of course, I don't like the crush, but I thought I might miss you, and simply came to say, that in case I do, good-by."

Not a smile! I went down the aisle to my seat feeling myself touching the floor with a thud at every step. At Saratoga I hurried to a landau and ordered to be driven rapidly to a private hotel so as to escape the great demonstration to the president. "Get along as quickly as you can," I said to the driver, and "he got"—through the band and the soldiers, who made way until we were blocked. Then formed the president's line; the way was opened and I found myself heading the line, much to my own discomfiture, though I was hailed by many friends, one of whom said afterward at the hotel: "You are a good fellow to work up an ad.," of which, however, I had no idea, as the very contrary was my intention.

In London it is custom, instead of a benefit, as we give in America, to have a dinner under the auspices of the actors' benevolent fund. At one dinner five thousand dollars were raised, which was expended for the actors of London. The admission fee was one guinea and everything was strictly conventional, after the English style. There was a man—the toastmaster—who stood behind the chair who would address the diners after this fashion: "I crave your attention. I ask you to drink to the health of her majesty, the queen. Fill the bumpers."

At an actor's benevolent fund dinner given in London in 1891, with Henry Irving in the chair, cards were furnished each one present with blanks to be filled by Christian and surname, residence and by the pounds, shillings and pence, either donated or put down as annual subscription.

At these English dinners the speeches have, of course, lots of meat in them, but they lack the gravy. They have a peculiar sort of help-me-over-the-fence kind of limp. They are slow and loggy by the side of American style. The Frenchman, if he be present, is so polite, with a dash of violet, you don't know whether he is going to say it or not, but he always suggests it.

Much depends upon the guest of these dinners. During the annual dinner of the Green Room club given at the Crystal Palace, London, at which among others were present Wilson Barrett, Comyns Carr, the late Harry Petit, Arthur Jones and Sir Augustus Harris, with Mr. Bancroft, chairman, an animated discussion arose at the wrong time in which the guests even got to calling one another names. Finally when I was called on I found myself in a most trying position in the midst of the excitement. But luckily I was followed by that king of story tellers, Nat Goodwin, who soon put them all in a good humor. By the way, it was Nat who said that "wit is the power to say what everybody else would have said, if he had thought of it."

In my remarks about Englishmen I must except Sir Edwin Arnold who is a prince of talkers as, also, is Henry Irving. Sir Edwin, speaking of Mr. Gladstone said that the premier lacked humor and that no one ever heard him make a witty remark, and further on in his talk said Sir Edwin: "Laughter lives next to the most tender tears." I supposed he must get this exquisite aptness of speech from his gifted American wife.

Many people have an idea that actors are poor talkers outside of their lines. The fact is they are becoming more adaptable every day. Mr. Irving can be very charming upon occasion, as he was at the dinner given him on his last visit to America by the Lotus club. What delicate humor this: "May I find even an increase of the consciousness of virtue which now and then animates you, for if it be a task to climb up additional steps it shows an amount of self belief which experience alone can prove justified, when after such a banquet as to-night you are not afraid to venture down them. Again, I understand that an inquiring mind at Detroit has discovered that our friend Bacon wrote not only the whole of Shakespeare, but also Christopher Marlowe, Edmund Spencer, and Burton's Anatomy of Melancholy. I mention this to show you that even in New York you don't know everything, and that it is possible that you may wake one morning to learn that the spirit of Bacon dictated the constitution of the United States. But limited as your knowledge may be, there is no limit to your good will and your good fellowshop."

At the Lambs club dinners actors are to be heard at their best, though the playrights are in the lead. There is no more lovely wit anywhere than is heard upon such occasions from Gus Thomas, Sydney Rosenfeld, Milton Lackaye, Bronson Howard, Charley Hoyt, Nat Goodwin, Gus. Thomas, the gentleman with the mellow passionate throw of the Hawaiian seas in his eloquence, covers more keys perhaps than any man in this city. Had he been a lawyer his fame as an orator would have been world-wide.

When an American gets up at these English dinners, the Englishmen regard him with wide-eyed wonder. They expect to see him "blanketed" and flop around like the Vigilant did when she dropped in a dead faint by the side of the Valkyrie in the first day's race. They don't see it; the American carries his sail full of wind and after one or two glasses of wine you see him setting his spinnaker and as he comes around the lightship, the Britishers are too dumb with astonishment except to grunt: "He's a corker!" But the American has no cinch. Many of his most darling jokes fall as dead as mine did on Mr. Harrison. Of course, this does not apply to the Savage and Green Room clubs or clubs of that kind, where American humor has fought its way to the front and where by much practice the members have come to know the places where common courtesy demands a laugh. But they are improving, as I have discovered during my visits to England for the last ten years.

It would not do to omit here Johnny Wise or Col. Fellows, the two repartee and epigram men. At the dinner given three years ago at the Astor house to Judge Pryor, where Dr. Depew spoke of Cleveland as the typical American, Johnny Wise dropped into this pleasantry concerning Judge Pryor: "A word as to the honored guest. What is the name of that opera in which a wild boar rushes across the stage with flames breathing from his nostrils? Well, the name doesn't matter, but whenever I witness that scene in it, I think of the manner in which Roger A. Pryor edited the Richmond Enquirer. That is the kind of fiery cuss he was."

Parke Godwin's talks are full of meat, in fact he forgets himself and sometimes goes too long. Few men can make a quick speech.

Murat Halstead can write better than he can speak, but when you know him you can forgive all this.

Then let us be thankful for those dinners that after all give us the only true glimpses of men who otherwise would be unknown to their fellows.

Long live dinners!

Merrily yours,
MARSHALL P. WILDER.

HAD MET BEFORE,

But in Circumstances Not Conducive to Recognition.

The drummer had for some time been watching a flashy-looking city crook playing a game of cards with a man on the sleeper, who might have been a farmer, and then again who might have been something else. All of a sudden, as the train pulled up at a station, the sharper made a wild break and rushed out of the car and off the platform, leaving everything. The other man simply smiled, and looked over at the drummer.

"What the mischief was the matter with that party?" asked the drummer, taking a seat with the smiler.

"There's a story goes with that," replied the smiler quietly. "Want to hear it?"

"Indeed, I do."

"Here she goes, then. About five years ago I had some cattle to deliver in Chicago, and when I got there I stopped out by the stock yards in a hotel I found convenient. It wasn't in a very good neighborhood, but I wasn't looking for society fixings, so I didn't care much. I had some money and a fine watch, and once or twice during the evening, as I sat around the barroom, I noticed I was being watched by several of the loafers about the place. When I went up to my room I locked the door and bolted it and took a look out of the window to see what was outside. I found it opened out onto a sort of shed about eight feet below, and that ran down within climbing distance of the ground. I took this observation so as to know where I was going to be at in case of a fire. Then I went to bed, leaving the window up, as it was a hot night.

"I don't know how long it was after I had been asleep that some one awakened me. At first I thought I was dreaming, but just as I tried to go to sleep again I heard the noise once more, and this time I didn't try to go to sleep. I got up and went over toward the window with a six-inch knife in my hand that I thought would come handy in case I found at the window what I thought I would. It was quite dark on that side of the house, and when I got up close I could hear two men whispering on the shed roof. I listened and heard one tell the other to stoop down and he would climb on his shoulders and from there pull himself up to my window. By this time I was standing by the window ready to meet my visitor as soon as he came. While I was thinking whether to kill him or not, I saw his fingers slide up over the window sill seeking for a good grip. Then they stretched down tight as if the man were testing his strength for the final pull. At this moment I reached forward, and with a swish I whacked two of those fingers off with my knife. I kept very quiet about it too, but my visitors didn't, and they rolled and tumbled off that roof in a manner worth coming all that way to see. Then I went back to bed, but I fastened down the window. Next morning when I got up, which was just at daybreak, for I had my cattle to look after, I went to the window to see what was left of the wreck, and I saw two fingers on the sill. The owner had forgotten them in his hurry the night before, and it struck me then for the first time that I ought to take charge of them, so that if they were ever called for I could return them.

"Well, I took them along with me, and as soon as I could get into a drug store I got a bottle filled with spirits and put them into it. Until to-day I have not been able to find anybody that I thought might want them, although I have carried them ever since when I go anywhere, and while that duffer you saw trying to work me first shuffled his cards I noticed that he was short two fingers. About the time he thought he had me I pulled the bottle out of my pocket, and, sticking it right at him, I asked him if he didn't think he had better see if he couldn't fit them on to the stumps he had. It took him about a minute to catch on, but when he did, well, you know the rest. I guess he must have been the chap that tried to climb in my window that night," and as the man smiled the drummer wondered how it was that truth was oftentimes stranger than fiction, and handed the bottle, with its two ghastly and silent witnesses, back to the owner.—[Detroit Free Press.

Things Were Different Then.

"The traveling men of to-day don't know what hard lines are," said Thomas L. Martin, who runs a bookstore at the corner of 12th and Locust streets, to me the other day. I was a traveling man myself way back yonder in the '60s, and I think we had about as hard a row to hoe as the next fellow. We used to start from Kansas City in wagons and drive around on those Kansas prairies for six or eight weeks at a time. They didn't have hotels out there in those days, either, and we thought ourselves in luck to get to sleep in the hay in some man's barn. On other nights we would camp in our wagon. We did our own cooking, and sometimes washed our own clothes. I tell you, the traveling man of to-day has a regular snap."—[Kansas City Times.