STEPHEN LEACOCK: THE MAN AND HIS ART

A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT

OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF

MASTER OF ARTS

BY

SELMA DOVE SKOLL

MCGILL UNIVERSITY, MONTREAL QUEBEC
FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES AND RESEARCH
DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH

AUGUST, 1956

P R E F A C E:

STEPHEN LEACOCK, THE MAN AND HIS ART

C O N T E N T S

Everyone is familiar with Stephen Leacock, the humorist, for of all the characters he created, not one of them is half so paradoxical nor has more chance of immortality than himself. Leacock never for one moment fooled himself into thinking that as a humorist he ranked in the same catagory as Aristophanes, Chaucer or Dickens, but he knew that what he had to say was wise, that he could always make people laugh, and that humour, after all else, is "the saving grace of humanity."

Today, only twelve years since his death, a great number of stories, some true and some fictional, have become attached to his name. The Stephen Leacock that the world knows best is a man who never quite kept pace with the modern world and who was at times even a little afraid of it. He is a man who distrusted large institutions and automobile speedometers that registered over thirty-five miles per hour. He had two telephone lines in his home, but went to great lengths to avoid using either of them. His favourite summer pastime was fishing and for this purpose he preferred a gaff-rigged yawl to a motor boat that "always gets you there," and he infinitely preferred excursion steamers on the secondary waters of Ontario to ocean-going vessels.

Around McGill he was known as the worst dressed professor on campus — a man who deliberately wore clothes a size and a half too large for his frame — and a teacher who gave his students more chuckles than sound economics for their money. In Orillia, where he spent his summers,

he was highly respected, not for his literary output, but for the size and quality of his tomato crop.

The Stephen Leacock that the world knows and loves is remembered best for his genial good humour, for his belief in the essential goodness of man, and for his love of living and life. But the time has come to sort out some of the stories about him and to try to present a complete picture of Stephen Leacock, the Man. The first problem of this thesis, then, is one of perspective, that is, to look carefully at the work of a man without losing sight of his colourful personality. This problem has been simplified by the fact that many of his friends and colleagues are still alive; but it has been complicated by the fact that many of the stories about him have been enlarged and polished and it is sometimes hard to differentiate between the fictional and the true.

The second problem is one of definition. In terms of the long span of English literature, Leacock's works are too recent to have attracted any considerable body of critical attention, and much of his writing is still being collected. There is, as yet, not one critical biography of the man and his works. There are, however, two very good collections of his books -- one belonging to McGill University in Montreal and the other to the Orillia Public Library in Orillia Ontario. The time has come for a comprehensive study of his work by sorting out and examining some of the recurring themes in his writing and evaluating both his style and his contribution to Canadian literature.

Fortunately, the study is somewhat simplified by the fact that Leacock did not publish his first book until he was forty-one years of age and, although after that time a book appeared every year, his style did not change to any considerable extent. But because of the wealth of material which he wrote on every conceivable subject, we have had to limit the scope of this thesis to the subjects which were nearest to his heart--humour in theory and practice, education and educational methods, and contemporary social vagaries.

Leacock was the first person in Canada to show that humour was a serious and respectable art, that money could be made from it, and that it need not conflict with the writer's other interests. Leacock was a responsible Canadian who saw through the pretensions of the new materialistic society and who chose to laugh rather than weep at men's frailties. Anglican in religious conviction and conservative in politics, he was a middle of the way man rather than a radical reformer in everything he did. But with his wide interests, extensive knowledge and travelling, he could not be brushed aside by his fellow Canadians as an irresponsible fun-maker. As G.G. Sedgewick says, this has been an important lesson for Canadians:

> In my belief Leacock has done a great deal to mitigate our provincialism. His home was in Montreal, but he was at home in New York and London; he was a graduate of Toronto and Chicago, and he adorned Oxford with a famous compliment; his humour was at once of The New Yorker and of Punch; and with his interests ... he girdled the earth like a second Puck. He is the first and only Canadian man of letters whom responsible judgement has reckoned the greatest of his kind. To Canadians this has been more than a pride, it has been a liberal education.[1]

---

[1] G.G. Sedgewick, "Stephen Leacock as a Man of Letters," University of Toronto Quarterly, XV (October, 1945), 26.

This thesis, then, is a critical biography of Stephen Leacock. He used to say that we have two ball and chains tied to our ankles, the one is time and the other, money. Both these things, it will be shown, played an important part in the life and work of Stephen Leacock.

I should like to express my thanks to Mr. Hugh MacLennan and Mr. John Culliton of McGill University who gave freely of their time and advise in the preparation of this thesis, and to the members of the staff of Redpath Library for the use of the collections of books and manuscripts in the Rare Books Room and for helping me to locate obscure works by Leacock. I also owe a debt of gratitude to Miss Mary Sheridan of the Orillia Public Library for allowing me to use the Leacock manuscripts and letters in her keeping and for sending me numerous articles as well as newspaper clippings which appeared at the time of Leacock's death. Thanks also go to the University of Toronto Library and to the New York Public Library for sending me microfilm and photostats of Leacock's early contributions to The Varsity, to Puck, Grip and Truth; to Queens University for three letters from their Lorne Pierce Collection of Canadiana; to the Universities of British Columbia, Saskatchewan, Western Ontario and Washington, and to the Buffalo Public Library for the material they sent; and to the McGill Graduate Society for the use of a transcription recording of a radio address by Leacock. To all the above and to many more, I express my sincere thanks.

I N T R O D U C T I O N:

SOME NOTES TOWARDS A DEFINITION OF HUMOUR

The term "humour" is one which is applied in a general sense to refer either to a work of art or to a characteristic which may occur in any kind of writing. Similarly, the term is used to describe a teller of funny stories or one of man's natural endowments, his sense of humour. As an art form humour has been less analysed than its counterpart, tragedy, and until recently little attention had even been paid to the nature of the laughter which accompanies humour. For this reason, and before beginning a study of the work of Stephen Leacock, it would be well to make some general observations about humour as an art form.

At the end of the Symposium, it is reported that Socrates in a debate made his companions acknowledge that the genius in comedy is the same as that of tragedy and that the true artist in tragedy is an artist in comedy also.[1] And yet the Greeks were afraid of too much laughter.

Everything in life has both its comic and tragic aspects and a work of art can be either tragic or comic depending on the creator. Similarly, any situation which at first may seem entirely humorous, may, on closer examination, contain the seeds of tragedy. Take for example the case of Mr. Tomlinson, the Financial Wizard in Arcadian Adventures Among The Idle Rich. Mr. Tomlinson makes a great deal of money on the stock market overnight and then loses it just as quickly. Under other

---

[1] Plato, Symposium, trans. B. Jowett, in The Works of Plato, ed. Irwin Edman (New York, 1928), p. 393.

circumstances this would imply a tragic conclusion but with Leacock manipulating the strings, it becomes a comic episode.

Comedy, unlike tragedy, has never developed a continuing form and the reasons for this are many. In the first place humour is an art form which depends on recognition. While tragedy deals with the infinite and the eternally true, humour deals with the finite, the here and now. Humour, to be successful, must bind the writer and reader through the recognition of some incongruity in language, situation, character or life. In the second place, humour is difficult to transmit from one age to another because it demands the agreement between author and reader that certain things are funny, and what may be funny to one age need not appeal to the next. Similarly, it is almost impossible to translate humour from one language to another because certain humorous thoughts or ideas defy translation. Different nationalities have their own special brand of humour which does not seem humorous to the outsider, suggesting once again that humour is the art of discovering recognitions.

Aristotle said that to the Greeks what was laughable was merely a subdivision of what was ugly, involving some defect that is not connected directly with pain or injury. To Hobbes laughter is anti-sympathetic and born in unkindliness. To Bergson laughter is an intellectual force, operating during an anesthesia of the heart and socially useful in correcting automatisms or situations in which a human being resembles a

puppet or a piece of pure mechanism. To Gregory laughter has become so humanized that a cripple or a person with some other physical deformity is no longer recognized as an object of merriment. To Leacock, as well, sympathy has supplanted derisive laughter and humour is now inseparable from humanity. Leacock defines humour briefly as the "kindly contemplation of the incongruities of life, and the artistic expression thereof,"[2] and the emphasis is, of course, on the word kindly.

In order for an object to be comical there must be a norm or accepted system within which the object pretends to fit but fails to do so. The humour lies in the reader spotting the incongruous relationship between the object and the standard:

> This relationship must be incongruous, in the sense that the comic object pretends to fit the norm, or in the humorous naïveté believes that it does, but the intellect perceives the discrepancy between the posited and the actual, finds it incongruous, and laughs.[3]

Everyone has a certain number of concepts either personal or merely as knowledge content which he uses everyday. But it takes a mind of a particular bent to discover the objects which can be made the source of laughter and humour. The humorist criticizes the limitations of certain concepts thus giving a clearer perception of the essential nature of the object. The reader responds by being jolted out of a whole frame of reference which he had thought absolute.

---

[2] Stephen Leacock, Humor and Humanity (New York, 1938), p. 3.

[3] Kenneth Lash, "A Theory of the Comic as Insight," Journal of Philosophy, XLV (February, 1948), 118.

Literary humour can operate in any one of three ways -- it may be a-rational resulting in nonsense writing; it may be humour of the intellect acting as a social corrective; or, it may be humour of the heart offering sympathetic insight into life and reality.

Nonsense writing is one of the oldest branches of writing. Its main purpose is to upset all obvious laws of logic, all rational or comprehensible language. Because it is meaningless, nonsense is impervious to parody. The two most common methods of nonsense writing can be achieved as follows:

> You can obtain your nonsensical effect either by stating the most absurd fact, which transplants your imagination into topsy-turveydom, or by stating solemnly the most obvious fact as if it had just been discovered or as if its truth had only just begun to dawn upon your mind.[4]

Nonsense does not merely twist events into a different pattern, it breaks the pattern altogether. As fantasy, unreality steps in quietly and soon creates such images and forms that defy classification. When the topsy-turveydom is complete, the fun of the nonsense begins. But nonsense ceases to be nonsense if it takes itself too seriously.

The second way in which humour can operate is as a social corrective. To understand this kind of humour the difference must be explained between laughing at and laughing with and consequently the difference between humour and satire, for laughter does not presuppose humour.

---

[4] Emile Cammaerts, The Poetry of Nonsense (London, 1925), p. 75.

It would seem that where the two art forms, humour and satire, are most often confused is through the purpose of the laughter which each evokes. There are many kinds of non-humorous laughter particularly that in which the tension exceeds the capacity for controlled thinking. According to Baudelaire, laughter is the mark of man's primeval fall from grace and comes from the feeling of superiority over our fellow men:

> Comme le rire est essentiellement humain, il est essentiellement contradictoire, c'est à dire qu'il est à fois signe d'une grandeur infinie et d'une misère infinie, misère infinie rélativement a l'Etre absolu dont il possède la conception, grandeur infinie rélativement aux animaux. C'est du choc perpétuel de ces deux infinis que se dégage le rire.[5]

More recent thinkers are inclined to believe that laughter either binds us to our fellow men or them to us. Armstrong says, "Though to the detached observer laughter appears a shocking and unaccountable thing, a throw-back to the jungle, an irruption of the primitive and bestial through the rational and civilized, to the laugher himself it is a miraculous reconciliation. For in laughter a man becomes at one with himself."[6] To Eastman as well laughter is, after speech, the chief thing that holds society together.[7]

In artistic products the laughter of comedy is delight while that of satire is directed towards a preconceived end. Our pleasure is connected with the satisfaction of regarding actions or events of daily

---

5 Baudelaire, "De l'Essence du Rire," Curiosités esthétiques (Paris, 1869), p. 370. Quoted in J.Y.T. Grieg, The Psychology of Laughter and Comedy (New York, 1923), p. 258.

6 Martin Armstrong, Laughter, An Essay (New York, 1928), p. 15.

7 Max Eastman, The Sense of Humour (New York, 1921), p. 4.

life expressed in an unexpected way. But the surprise element of laughter is but a small part of literary humour. To laugh at an object means that the author is placing his standards above the object and the reader by accepting the author's standards exults over the object. This kind of laughter is basically derisive and the tool of the satirist, although on occasion it may be used by the humorist who, by his writing, is trying to preserve the sane and normal. To laugh with an object, however, is solely the property of the humorist and means that the reader identifies himself with the object rather than with the standard. In this case, the laughter is sympathetic and invites no external end other than enjoyment and reconciliation with the world.

Both humour and satire have their roots in man's world and both have their basis in incongruity. The purpose of the laughter which each evokes, however, is different. Satire tries to eradicate follies from society while humour tries to reconcile them with society. The primary distinction, then, between the humorist and satirist is that while both are concerned with pointing out the incongruities of life, the satirist is for the most part a reformer who wants immediate action while the humorist, seeing things in a more relative way, wants man to be satisfied with the human lot.

Because of this difference in purpose, the techniques of the humorist and satirist vary to a greater extent than merely in the type of laughter they try to evoke. The satirist at first tries to stimulate

coolness and dispassion in the reader and then proceeds with the criticism, which may take a form ranging from direct rebuke to impersonal logic. "Satire," says Worchester, "has an aim, a preconceived purpose: to instill a given set of emotions or opinions into it's reader. To succeed, it must practise the art of persuasion and become proficient with the tools of that art."[8] Once the preliminary sympathy is won for the cause, the satirist becomes bolder in his attack; yet above all, he must appear dispassionate to the reader or else the indignation of the satire would vanish.

The humorist, on the other hand, though he need not be a social reformer, can be one; but his technique must be such that he gives the impression that he is at a disadvantage because he is entangled in the very contradictions of human life which he presents and therefore not the proper judge of them. Unlike satire, which may be directed at anything in any age, humour always bears on the contemporary world. Some of the criticism of the humorist may have validity in times other than his own because it is dealing with human nature; yet, unlike the satirist the humorist never completely disowns the world, which is always the background and foreground of his work:

> [Humour] conserves values as embodied in customs and institutions that are viable, that have not been alienated from their source in human experience; it exposes values that have lost their franchise in the realm of experience and discloses the rationale whereby manners are confused with morals and convention supplants conscience.[9]

---

[8] David Worchester, The Art of Satire (Cambridge, 1940), pp. 8-9.

[9] Israel Knox, "Towards a Philosophy of Humour," Journal of Philosophy, XLVIII (August, 1951), 545.

Hence it follows that humour as a social corrective is the restorer of proportions, revealing absurdities and warning the reader not to take certain things too seriously. It corrects the solemnity of accepted evaluations and calls for a re-evaluation. A new norm may supplant or modify the old and thus lead to a keener perception of the totality of actuality, but this new standard in turn may call for a new evaluation, because humour is always dealing with the contemporary world.

To Bergson, the most important function of humour is that of a social corrective. He says that to live well is the aim of society and requires great flexibility. Thus society is compelled to be suspicious of inelasticity and has devised for this purpose a social gesture, laughter, as a corrective of all social aberrations:

> The rigid, the ready-made, the mechanical, in contrast with the supple, the ever-changing and the living, absent-mindedness in contrast with free activity, such are the defects that laughter singles out and would fain correct.[10]

While for Bergson humour is an intellectual force, for Parker, as well as for Leacock, it is also an emotional affair. Parker enlarges Bergson's theory to include not only the mechanical but also the spontaneous as a source of humorous invention. The reader, he says, may identify himself with the norm and laugh at the extreme, or he may identify himself with the rebellious or mischievous and laugh at the standard. This latter type of identification leads to the third type of humour, that of sympathetic insight.

---

[10] Henri Bergson, Laughter, trans. C. Brereton and F. Rothwell (London, 1911), p. 130.

It is possible for an object which at first pleased because of its unconventionality to become in turn a new convention and the source of scornful laughter. But humour pardons where satire condemns:

> Comedy is either biting or kindly. The one is moralistic and reformatory in its aim, the other is aesthetic and contemplative. Because of its failure in sympathy, satirical comedy is incomplete as an art. It provides insight and pleasure in the object, but not union with it. It does not attain to beauty, which is free and reconciling. Kindly comedy or humor, on the other hand, is full beauty, combining sympathy with judgement, abandon with reflection .... The satire, which begins in moral fervour, must end in moral understanding. The bond that binds us to our fellows is too strong to be broken by the aloofness of our condemnation. The same intelligence that discerns the incongruity between what men ought to be and what they are, cannot fail to penetrate the impelling reasons for the failure. Only in humor is sympathetic insight complete. Satire has a temporal usefulness of a practical expedient, humor the eternal value of beauty.[11]

If the author adds sympathy to the technical devices of humour, the final reach is closer to pathos than to mere incongruous contrast or to laughter for the sake of relief. But the follies of men are comical only so long as the reader doesn't place his sympathies too much with the sufferings themselves. The disinterestedness of comedy is such that feeling must be dominated by reflection.

The most effective kind of humour is clearly that in which the implicit standard is that of the object under discussion rather than that of some outside norm. There is a need for a close acquaintance with the object, an immediate recognition of the incongruity, and the laughter is then derived from the reader's acceptance of the situation. Humour as sympathetic insight forces the reader to accept misfortune as an intrinsic

---

[11] Dewitt H. Parker, The Principles of Aesthetics (Boston, 1920), p. 125.

part of experience and makes men forego personal dogma, if only momentarily, for a communal point of view.

It will be seen that Leacock completely adhered to Parker's concept of humour as sympathetic insight. Leacock believed that humour, like humanity, has grown more kindly through the ages and that its most important function is to offer consolation for everyday misfortunes. In his earlier writings he used humour mainly as a social corrective by poking fun at the social vagaries of the day and by placing holes in the facade of self-importance. In the early part of the 1920's he met G. K. Chesterton who helped Leacock crystallize his theory of humour as reconciliation. As he grew older Leacock became more aware of the need for human kindliness and also became more conscious of using humour as a means of sympathetic insight into the nature of reality and reconciliation with life.

Recent critics have taken the stand that Leacock was Canada's first satirist. This statement has little truth for Stephen Leacock did not want to fill the role of a satirist, even if the country had been ready for the services of one. When he exposed the commercialized taste of the early twentieth century, he found laughter a more satisfying and more effective instrument than direct rebuke. But he was also a man who longed for material comfort and was himself entangled in the very contradictions he presented.

Stephen Leacock made humour his business: his technique and point of view were always that of the humorist. Although on occasion he indulged in somewhat more caustic forms of humour, he laughed with and not at men and their foibles. On the whole he demanded little more of his readers than a willingness to share with him in the fun which he presented. To his invitation, hundreds of thousands of them responded.

Let us meet Stephen Leacock, the man and the artist.

C H A P T E R O N E:

THE BOY I LEFT BEHIND ME (1869-1909)

Stephen Butler Leacock was born in Swanmoor, Hants, England on December 30, 1869. He was the third son of Peter and Agnes Leacock but the first to be born in England. His two older brothers, Jim and Dick, were born in South Africa where their parents had been sent by the Leacock family shortly after their marriage in 1866. According to Stephen Leacock's unfinished autobiography,[1] a few generations before this, the Leacock family had made a great deal of money from the Madeira wine trade. Stephen's great grandfather retired to Oak Hill on the Isle of Wight where for the next two generations the family lived comfortably without working very hard. But when Peter Leacock married Agnes Butler, the daughter of Rev. Stephen Butler of Hambledon, most of the money was gone and the Leacock family sent the young couple off to make their fortune in South Africa. Peter tried farming in Natal but the climate did not agree with his wife and children, the locusts ate his crops, and he was forced to return home two years later.

Their arrival in England was not welcomed by the Leacock family and lest they become a burden on the dwindling resources of the estate, Peter's father sent him down to Porchester in order that he might learn to be a "gentleman farmer." In the course of the next seven years Stephen and three more children were born to Peter and Agnes Leacock. When the family decided that enough time and money had been spent on Peter's farming education, he was sent to America — first to Kansas and later to Upper

---

[1] Stephen Leacock, The Boy I Left Behind Me (London, 1947), p. 19.

Canada -- to find a piece of land on which he and his family could settle. In the meantime, Mrs. Leacock and the children remained in Porchester.

By the autumn of 1875, Stephen and his two older brothers were old enough to attend school in Porchester. Of the kind of instruction they received there, Leacock later reminisced:

> I recall but little of the Dame's School except the first lesson in geography in which the Dame held up a map and we children recited in chorus, "the top of the map is always the north, the bottom south, the right-hand east, the left-hand west"!! I wanted to speak out and say, "But it's only that way because you're holding it that way," but I was afraid to. Cracks with a ruler were as easy to get in a Dame's School as scratches down on the Rio Grande.[2]

Living in England ended abruptly and for good the following year when the family was again transplanted, this time to Canada. In August 1876, Mrs. Leacock and her six small children went to join Peter who had taken a farm four miles south of Lake Simcoe in Ontario. The farm consisted of one hundred acres of land and an old clap-board house, thirty-five miles away from the nearest railroad.

As soon as they were settled, the three oldest children were enrolled in School Section No. 3, Georgina Township, but the two-mile walk each day made regular attendance in the winter months virtually impossible. Mrs. Leacock decided to withdraw the children from school and, until a qualified tutor could be secured, she taught them herself from texts which she had used at an English Finishing School for Ladies. Grandfather Leacock, in fear that the family might return to England, sent money for a tutor and Harry Parks was engaged to teach the children for the next few years.

---

[2] The Boy I Left Behind Me, p. 36.

The isolation of the family was now almost complete. Peter Leacock, who could not adapt himself to farm life, alternated between periods of furious industry and periods of idleness and heavy drinking. On occasions he disappeared for months at a time, leaving his wife to cope with the children and the farm with its mounting debts. On one occasion he went west with his brother, E.P. Leacock, the "remarkable uncle" later immortalized in a short story.[3]

In spite of the many hardships, homelife was fairly pleasant. Mrs. Leacock had a small income from England and a hired man and his wife came in to help with the work. Evenings, after the lessons were done, Mrs. Leacock often read to the children a chapter from the works of Sir Walter Scott or part of an adventure story like Robinson Crusoe. Once in a while, a local cricket match or a trip to Toronto provided a special treat. One summer around 1880 the family was even able to rent a summer house on the lake; this meant days of sailing and tennis for the children. But the farm drifted into permanent debt and late in 1881, through the help of a small inheritance from England, the family moved to Toronto.

Once they were installed in their new home, Mrs. Leacock, because she wanted her children to have a decent education, enrolled Jim and Dick at Upper Canada College, an old and aristocratic school. In February 1882, Stephen was also enrolled at the private school but a severe case of homesickness forced him to leave almost immediately. He re-entered after the

---

[3] Stephen Leacock, "The Most Unforgettable Character I've Met," Reader's Digest, XXXIX (July, 1941), 18-22.

Easter vacation that year and remained first as a boarder, then as a day-boy and later as a boarder again, until he graduated in 1887. When his two older brothers left the school — Dick to join the Mounted Police and Jim to go west with E.P. Leacock — Charlie, a younger member of the family which had grown considerably by this time, joined Stephen as a day-boy.

During the first two years that he spent at Upper Canada College, Stephen took little interest in his studies. Then in the third year he became much more serious and by the end of the fourth he ranked first in General Proficiency with special honours in Classical and Modern Languages. The next year he did even better by leading the class in Mathematics as well. When he matriculated in 1887, he held the position of Head Boy of the school.

While at Upper Canada College, Stephen was active in school sports and also entered into a number of journalistic projects. One of these was the re-establishment of The College Times, a school newspaper containing verse, prose, and current school news, which until July 1883 had appeared every third Thursday in the college year. On November 4, 1886 The College Times was revived under the joint editorship of S.B. Leacock and F.J. Davidson, with B.M. Jones and H.G. Crocker as sub-editors. The series continued until June 9, 1887 at which time Stephen graduated from the school.[4] This was the first of Leacock's literary ventures.

In the fall of 1887 Stephen entered the University of Toronto and managed to telescope two years of study into one. Although he was doing exceptionally well in his studies, he was forced to leave at the end of

---

[4] A History of Upper Canada College 1829-1892, comp. and ed. George Dickson and G. Mercer Adam (Toronto, 1893), p. 260.

of the session because matters were becoming increasingly more difficult at home. His father, who had previously gone away from home for months at a time, now deserted the family completely. Since the two oldest boys also left earlier, Stephen at seventeen years of age became head of the family. On the whole his childhood had been fairly happy except when his father had been drinking too much and took out his failure on the family. When his father left home this time, however, Stephen deeply resented his father's shirking of responsibility, but more than that he resented the position which had been forced on him. Although Peter Leacock lived to a very old age, Stephen never again saw his father nor tried to communicate with him.

Not qualified for any professional work, Stephen entered Strathroy Collegiate Institute near London Ontario for a three-months preparatory course in high school teaching. It was here that he learned his first lesson in the need for human kindliness in humour, a lesson which he never forgot. During an English lesson his teacher, Jimmy Wetherell, asked him to take over the class and being a born mimic, Stephen did so in a voice and manner that completely resembled that of his instructor:

> I did so with a completeness and resemblance to Jimmy's voice and manner which of course delighted the class. Titters ran through the room. Encouraged as an artist I laid it on too thick. The kindly principal saw it himself and flushed pink. When I finished he said, "I am afraid I admire your brains more than your manners." The words cut me to the quick, I felt them to be so true and yet so completely without malice. For I had no real "nerve," no real "gall." It was the art of imitation that appealed to me. I had not realized how it might affect the person concerned. I learned with it my first lesson in the need for human kindliness as an element in humour.[5]

---

[5] The Boy I Left Behind Me, p. 99.

In February 1889, Stephen got his first teaching position at Uxbridge where Harry Parks, his tutor on the old farm, was now headmaster. The next year he was offered a job as Assistant Master of Modern Languages at Upper Canada College. He gladly accepted the offer because it allowed him enough time and money to continue his studies at the university at the same time. In spite of the number of hours required for teaching and studying, he still found time to indulge in a number of extra-curricular activities at the university. He joined the Modern Languages Club and on one occasion read to the members an essay entitled "Strummenliebe of Musaus." It was reported the next day in The Varsity that the essay "was written in Mr. Leacock's best style; it was simple and easily understood, while his facetious manner of handling the subject added much to the enjoyment of those who were fortunate enough to hear it."[6]

During his last year at the University of Toronto, he became a contributing editor to The Varsity, the college newspaper, for which he wrote almost weekly articles under the by-line of "The Sanctum Philosopher." The best of these articles — most of which deal with subjects closely connected with college life and activities — are "The Establishment of the University of Moon College,"[7] "The Philosophy of Love" which is a highly involved argument in logic styled as a Socratic dialogue,[8] and

---

6 "News Note," The Varsity, X (March 10, 1891), 223.

7 Stephen Leacock, "The Establishment of the University of Moon College," The Varsity, X (1890), 140.

8 Stephen Leacock, "The Philosophy of Love," The Varsity, X (December 9, 1890), 112-113.

"A Lost Work by the Sanctum Philosopher," which is an annotated parody of Longfellow's Hiawatha.[9] In these articles as in "Imogene: a legend of the Days of Chivalry"[10] which is written under his own name, there is already evident the easy-going manner which Leacock was to adopt in his later writings.

Stephen Leacock got his Bachelor of Arts degree from the University of Toronto in the spring of 1891 and at the same time he was promoted to First Modern Languages Master at Upper Canada College. Although he had entered school teaching as a temporary measure, he remained on as an instructor at Upper Canada College until the autumn of 1899. From 1895 until he left, he also acted as Senior House Master. In all he was engaged as a teacher for ten years but he disliked it as intensely on the last day as he did on the first.

It was not that he did not make a good teacher. He was greatly respected by his colleagues and his students because he had the virtue of being able to take a joke on himself. He encouraged and helped his pupils but he did not allow them to take any liberties:

> The truth is that he was teaching school merely to get enough money to take a post-graduate course, and he regarded us schoolboys as pestilential little nuisances — which we were. The only gusto he showed at that time was when he caned us; there was none of that sickening "this hurts me more than it does you" air about these transactions.[11]

---

9 Stephen Leacock, "A Lost Work by the Sanctum Philosopher," The Varsity, X (November 18, 1890), 76-77.

10 Stephen Leacock, "Imogene: a legend of the Days of Chivalry," The Varsity, XI (October 6, 1891), 2-3.

11 B.K. Sandwell, "A Tribute to Stephen Leacock," Broadcast over C.B.C. National Network, Sunday, April 2, 1944, p. 1.

He was not happy at school teaching and during this period his dissatisfaction with his lot became increasingly stronger. For a few years after he received his B.A., the vital energy which he had displayed and which was again to return to him, seems to have left him. His colleagues felt that he would eventually turn his attention to some other profession but they were concerned over the lethargy which had come over him:

> Leacock had been, and was to be hereafter, a prodigious worker, yet always so cunningly manipulating his time that he seemed to have large margins of leisure to spare. But for the moment the desire if not the capacity for work had left him. We felt that his brilliance could carry him to any heights he chose, but that the ambition to succeed bore no relation to the powers he possessed. In this spring of 1893 he had published nothing since his boyish contributions to the College Times. Our prognostications, therefore, did not touch the possibilities of a successful literary career.[12]

During his summer vacations Stephen abandoned himself to fun. Even in these days he had adopted a casual attitude to dress. Two photographs taken in 1894 and now in the possession of the McGill University Library show him on his sailboat in his favourite dress — creased white trousers, a white shirt incorrectly buttoned and slightly too large, and a pipe sticking out of his mouth. Because of his infectious personality, he attracted a large circle of friends. They particularly enjoyed his skill as a mimic which, since his initial lesson in human kindliness at Strathroy, never contained any malice either openly or in the intonations. Although he still caricatured personality, he never maligned persons in particular. It was the art that appealed to him. He had a zest for intelligent fun and created amusing pastimes for himself and his friends. One of his personal friends remarked:

---

[12] Pelham Edgar, "Stephen Leacock," Queens Quarterly, LIII(Summer, 1946), 176.

To us, then, his academic gown was not in the picture at all. Lake Simcoe was, to a large degree, his play-ground then; the yacht was his classroom and a fishing pole his blackboard wand.

Stephen Leacock became a PhD in classic garb; we knew him in flannels. He became a popular lecturer; we rejoiced in him as a royal jester in vacation motley. He lighted bonfires with us fifty years ago; those fires still burn brightly.[13]

By the fall of 1893, complete boredom with the teaching profession had taken hold of him and he was anxious to find a way out of it. He took to carrying around a little notebook in which, when the occasion prompted him, he scribbled hints for short stories, some of them partly written out, others merely outlined. During the next few years, many of them had the word "sold" scribbled across the page.

During this year he was just recovering from a hopeless love affair with a young woman who had been sent away to Colorado for a tuberculosis cure. One writer says, "The tragic ridiculousness of the situation could not touch even his springs of humour, and as he told us — here, I think, with some revival of the comic spirit — he welcomed the sympathy of the negro waiter who, he said, had watched him weeping into his soup."[14] In a mood of despondency he wrote two sentimental love idylls with comic undertones. Bent on publication, he sent them to Harper's who promptly rejected them. This proved to be a turning point in his life. He knew that he had to get out of the teaching profession and that by writing for publication he could do so; but since he could not induce a tear, he knew

---

13 Robert B. Pattison, "Stephen Leacock At Play," Typescript in the Collection of the Orillia Public Library, Orillia Ontario, p. 6.

14 Pelham Edgar, p. 177.

he could win a laugh. He later said capriciously of the first piece he sold:

> The one called "A, B, and C" was the first of them. The editor of a Toronto paper gave me two dollars for it. This opened up for me a new world: it proved to me that an industrious man of my genius, if he worked hard and kept clear of stimulants and bad company, could earn as much as eight dollars a month with his pen. In fact, this has since proved true.[15]

Within the next two years Leacock had about a dozen humorous stories printed in leading American and British magazines. Most of the sketches, however, were first published in Truth, a light contemporary magazine, edited by Peter McArthur from August 1895 until 1897. It was Peter McArthur who later encouraged him to put out his first book, as he says in the following letter:

> ...I am pleased and flattered to be included in your Series, and especially delighted to think that I am to be dealt with by Peter McArthur. I owe him a great deal of kindness and encouragement when I was first starting to write, which I can never forget. I may say that it was Peter McArthur who helped me to bring out my first book. Up to the time of meeting him I had really only done short, casual stuff.[16]

Of the many sketches published during these years, the majority of them were reprinted in his first books. The others, written merely for the sake of making some money, were ephemeral and Leacock thought them better forgotten. Throughout his life his best work was always that which had been first built up in conversation. At this time there was a rather brilliant staff of teachers at Upper Canada College such as Pelham Edgar, George Dickson, A. H. Young, W.A. Neilson, later president of Smith College,

---

15 Quoted in Peter McArthur, Stephen Leacock (Toronto, 1923), p. 8.

16 Stephen Leacock, "Letter to Mr. Ryerson," January 11, 1923. Collection of Queens University, Kingston Ontario.

and Leacock's own roommate, G. Howard Ferguson, later Premier of Ontario. Leacock loved to keep them entertained with his stories and during the winter evenings gave them sneak previews of "My Financial Career," "Boarding House Geometry" and many other sketches which have since become classics in Canadian humour. These sketches "by his own admission, he used to jot down ... when his attention was momentarily disengaged from the church service."[17]

Although he was experimenting with various techniques of humour, his work at this time already contained the element of the spoken rather than the written word. He had the ability to make his sketches sound as if they had been recorded from a conversation between author and reader, and not like a laboured or polished prose essay. The feeling that the reader could interrupt at any time is the secret of his style. When he had to labour over something, or tried too hard to be the buffoon, his humour falls flat; but when it is easy on the ear as well as the eye, it is superb entertainment. It is always easy to recognize his discomfort when he is unsure of his subject, but on the whole there is a fund of homely philosophy beneath the foolery. As one writer has said, "There is more wisdom in one of Leacock's books than there is in the whole of "Canada and Its Provinces" in forty-eight volumes. Leacock himself admitted it."[18]

---

17 Pelham Edgar, p. 177.

18 B.K. Sandwell, "A Tribute to Stephen Leacock," p. 3.

Because of savings from his salary and pen, Leacock at last saw his way out of the teaching profession and looked around for a new course of study. Classical languages had long ceased to interest him and now Modern Languages as well were beginning to bore him. He began to read books on the new science of Political Economy and found the subject fascinating. He once compared himself to John Stuart Mill who worked all day for the East India Company and at night did literary work in order, at last, to be free to do literary work all the time:

> Fifty years ago I was a resident master in a boarding-school, a sort of all-day-and-all-night job, with a blind wall in front of it. To find a way out of it, and on, I took to getting up at five o'clock in the morning and studying political economy for three hours, every day, before school breakfast. This process so sharpened my sense of humour that I earned enough money by it to go away and study political economy; and that, you see, kept up my sense of humour like those self-feeding machines.[19]

In September 1899, he entered with the aid of a Fellowship the graduate school in Political Economy at the University of Chicago. For the next two full years and six months of each of the following two, he applied himself to his studies. During the remainder of the last two years, he was engaged as a lecturer in Political Economy at McGill University in Montreal. Meanwhile, in 1900, he married Beatrix Hamilton of Toronto. On June 16, 1903 Leacock received his PhD. for his thesis on "The Doctrine of Laissez Faire."[20] He was inordinately proud of this degree and tells an amusing anecdote about it. Apparently while taking a boat-trip to celebrate the occasion, he signed himself "Dr. Stephen Leacock" on the passenger list.

---

19 Stephen Leacock, My Remarkable Uncle (New York, 1942), p. 70.

20 Not deposited in the University of Chicago Library.

He was just straightening up in the cabin:

When a steward knocked and said, "Are you Dr. Leacock?"
"Yes," I answered.
"Well, the captain's compliments, doctor, and will you please come and have a look at the second stewardess's leg?"
I was off like a shot, realizing the obligations of a medical man. But I had no luck. Another fellow got there ahead of me. He was a Doctor of Divinity.[21]

With his change of intellectual interests from Modern Languages to Political Science, he also changed his affections from Toronto to McGill. It was at McGill that he found the security for which he had been looking. From 1903 until his retirement in 1936 he remained on the staff -- first as a lecturer and later as William Dow Professor of Political Science and Chairman of the Department.

His work as a lecturer at McGill occupied only a portion of his time and in the leisure hours he wrote his first two books: Elements of Political Science and Baldwin, Lafontaine and Hincks. The latter[22] is an account of the struggle for responsible government in the 1840's and is written in the lucid, expository narrative style which he adopted for his serious writings. Of the former[23] he was very proud and said, "At one time it was used in 35 American universities and many British. It was, I understand, the first textbook used in China after the establishment of the

---

21 Stephen Leacock, "The Difference of Degree," Reader's Digest, XXXVIII (May, 1941), 70. A note on the copy of this story written by Norman H. Friedman and now in the collection of the McGill University Library says, "Dr. Leacock told me that he had received more money for this little story per word than he had received for any of his writings -- He had received $200.00 for it."

22 Stephen Leacock, Baldwin, Lafontaine and Hincks (Toronto, 1907).

23 Stephen Leacock, The Elements of Political Science (Boston, 1906).

Republic and in Egypt before the war...not quite dead in 1937. I still receive small cheques."[24]

In 1907 he was given a year's leave of absence from his position at McGill in order to tour the British Empire as a Representative of the Rhodes Trust. He lectured on Imperial Unity:

When I state that these lectures were followed almost immediately by the Union of South Africa, the Banana Riots in Trinidad, and the Turco-Italian War, I think the reader can form some idea of their importance.[25]

When he returned home the next year, Stephen Leacock had established himself in his profession as an important Political Economist.

---

[24] Holograph note in the copy of Elements of Political Science belonging to the collection of McGill University Library, dated December 15, 1937.

[25] Stephen Leacock, Preface, Sunshine Sketches(Toronto, 1912), x.

C H A P T E R T W O:

THE MARK TWAIN OF THE BRITISH EMPIRE (1910-1911)

By 1908 Stephen Leacock had done all the growing-up that he intended to do and, although he was thirty-seven years old, he had not published one book of that tremendous output of humour which was to gain him a world-wide reputation.

Nor did it seem likely that he was to become Canada's foremost Man of Letters. He was beginning to look like a university don and his friends thought that he was at last fully satisfied with his profession. His two books on political science and history, respectively, and his tour of the British Empire had helped to make his name known as a serious political economist. As Head of the Department of Political Science at McGill, he enjoyed both the lecturing and the substantial amount of leisure time which it afforded him. Throughout his life he was very proud of his status in life:

> This emolument is so high as to place me distinctly above the policemen, postmen, street-car conductors, and other salaried officials of the neighbourhood, while I am able to mix with the poorer of the business men of the city on terms of something like equality. In point of leisure, I enjoy more in the four corners of a single year than a business man knows in his whole life. I thus have what the business man can never enjoy, an ability to think, and, what is still better, to stop thinking altogether for months at a time.[1]

Leacock soon gained the reputation of being the worst dressed professor at McGill. It was not that he did not have the clothes or pay enough for them; rather it was just that he refused to appear well-dressed

---

[1] Stephen Leacock, Preface, Sunshine Sketches, ix.

or to "shine in society." One of his friends says that "his was the carelessness of a locomotive engineer, who knows that he has a big job to do and gives it all his attention, and doesn't have to bother about clothes to keep up his social position."[2]

In 1908 Leacock bought a summer house and forty acres of land in Orillia for $1600. Situated on the shores of Lake Couchiching, the land originally housed a brewery and the estate was affectionally called Old Brewery Bay. Leacock said, "As a matter of fact I have known that name, Old Brewery Bay, to make people feel thirsty by correspondence as far away as Nevada."[3] In later years Old Brewery Bay became synonymous with humour since it was here that Leacock did most of his writing.

It was about this time that Leacock was admitted into the Pen and Pencil Club on the proposal of his friend, Andrew Macphail, who was then a lecturer in medicine at McGill. The members of this club were artists and writers who wanted to be able to discuss their work with other creative persons. It was a rather small club and the members included Robert Harris, William Brymmer, Maurice Cullen, George Murray, Paul Lafleur, and Jack McCrae. The Pen and Pencil Club met every other Saturday night in Edouard Dyonnet's studio under the Fraser Institute on Dorchester Street in Montreal and the routine was always the same. First the artists exhibited their latest creations and then one or more of the writers were invited to read something that they had just written. After this, the members

---

2 B.K. Sandwell, "A Tribute to Stephen Leacock," p. 3.

3 Stephen Leacock, Happy Stories (New York, 1943), p. 204.

sat around discussing the works they had seen or heard, and sipping whiskey and soda. One of the rigid rules of the club was that each member had to prepare something new for presentation at least once every six weeks.[4]

These meetings gave Leacock the incentive to organize some of the ideas which he had mulling around in his head; they also gave him the opportunity of trying out these stories on a willing audience. Up to this time he had considered his humorous writings as journalistic pieces, which had been created when he had been desperately in need of money, and which, in all likelihood, would never be heard of again. It is probable that because he had to produce new pieces to be read at the Pen and Pencil Club, he remembered some of the stories he had written in the nineties and conceived the idea of collecting them into a book. When he brought this idea to his good friend, B.K. Sandwell, who was then a morgue reporter on the Montreal Herald, Sandwell tried to dissuade him by warning him that "nobody in Canada had ever made a cent out of a book of humor, and that even if he was lucky enough to make a few dollars out of it, it would ruin his reputation as a political economist."[5]

But Leacock did not take Sandwell's advice and decided to put together some of his old magazine contributions "just to see what would happen to them." Since he had never kept copies of the stories, his wife spent many hours hunting through files of old periodicals. Finally enough

---

4 See Stephen Leacock, "Andrew Macphail," Queens Quarterly, XLV (Winter, 1938), 445-452.

5 B.K. Sandwell, "A Tribute to Stephen Leacock," p. 2.

material was unearthed to produce a slim volume. He took the manuscripts to his brother George who agreed to be the "publisher":

> I gathered up the stuff and if my memory serves me rightly after all these years, I took them down to a firm called the "Montreal News Company" to a man called Tangway or some such name. Stephen of course was then unknown as a writer and he said he could put them up in a small edition selling at .35¢, which would cost about .27¢, leaving an extra .08¢. So I told Stephen that I would be the publisher and take .05¢ and he could have .02¢ a copy. We laughed over the thing, as I think we were going to have to invest some $500.00 for the first edition.[6]

This small edition was called Literary Lapses and published under the author's own name, which was something of an innovation in Canada for a work of this nature. Up to this time for a professor to write humorously could be fatal to his academic standing, although occasional frivolous contributions to ephemeral magazines could be overlooked. The apologetic title, however, suggests that Leacock was not too sure of what the book might do to his reputation as a professor at McGill and as a political economist — a reputation which he valued highly and did not care to lose lightly. He felt that if necessary, he could toss it off as a jeu d'esprit, like Alice In Wonderland, for a few friends.

The first edition of Literary Lapses (Montreal, 1910) sold three thousand copies within two months of its appearance. This little volume has now become a rare item in Canadiana. One of these copies came to the attention of John Lane, England's most enterprising publisher of the time.

---

6 George Leacock, "Letter to Harold Hale," dated August 30, 1951. Collection of the Orillia Public Library, Orillia Ontario.

John Lane was impressed with the volume and undertook a London edition the same year. With reference to this transaction, Leacock later wrote:

> This little book was put together in 1909 from various previous sketches and was sent to the publishers of my political science. But they would not accept it: "Humour," they said, "was too uncertain." So I published it myself, printing 3000 copies that sold like hot pop corn. When the book got to England the publisher John Lane cabled an offer for it. I cabled back, "I accept with thanks." Later on at a banquet Mr. Lane said that he realised from the cable that I was the kind of man who would spend two shillings to say thank you.[7]

In the same year, 1910, Mark Twain died and in order to help with the sale of the book, John Lane nicknamed Leacock the "Mark Twain of the British Empire," because of a surface resemblance between their work. From that date on, Leacock the humorist stepped ahead of Leacock the economist and never gave way again.

As it first appeared, Literary Lapses contained twenty-six sketches, of which at least eighteen had been printed in light, humorous magazines during the last decade of the previous century. Later, more stories were added to the original number.

There is an air of timidity about the book which does not result solely from his apprehension about his scholastic reputation. Basically Leacock was a shy, silent man with an inward smile and it was this quality which was transmitted through the book to the reader. Later when he became successful, he continued to use this shyness as an essential ingredient of his technique as a humorist. One writer who met him about this

---

[7] Stephen Leacock, Holograph note to Norman Friedman dated December 12, 1934 in the copy of the Montreal edition of Literary Lapses. Collection of the McGill University Library.

time and again later on, describes the difference that success made to Leacock's personality:

> Leacock was no longer shy. Success had unharnessed that interior smile, and caused it to bubble continually over his granite face. Success has given him immense confidence. He plays with his audience, or rather we willingly, delightedly, play with him. I have never met a humorist who so rejoices in his own humour, and distributes all his whimsical thoughts so bounteously all around, and I have never met so ready a humorist.[8]

In spite of his studies in political science as well as his extensive travelling, Leacock was always a little afraid of the speed with which the modern world was moving. The general tone underlining Literary Lapses denotes his distrust of large institutions, big-business enterprises, and many features of the new commercial civilization. This was an age of increased prosperity due to the expansion of the Canadian west which brought with it new settlers and new capital; there was also the discovery of gold in the Yukon, silver and other mineral deposits in Ontario. Although Leacock was very fond of the things that money could buy, he shows deep concern for the way it was affecting standards of taste, social and cultural activities. He pokes fun at various features of this new materialistic society sometimes gently, sometimes more sharply, but all the time with deep regard for his fellow men.

Literary Lapses, however, is not the product of a satirist, although in it humour is often used as a satiric solvent. Leacock always maintained the viewpoint of the humorist when regarding human follies.

---

[8] C. Lewis Hind, More Authors and I (New York, 1922), p. 184.

It was noted earlier[9] but can be repeated that the fundamental difference between the humorist and the satirist lies not in the material each treats but rather in the outlook to that material. The satirist must appear dispassionate to the reader in order to arouse certain instincts and responses, generally of anger, revulsion or condemnation, from the reader. The humorist, on the other hand, must gain an immediate sympathy and in order to do so, he often pictures himself as entangled in the incongruities that he presents. Leacock was a shy person who tried always to be considerate of other people's feelings. He could not, nor did he have the desire, to be a satirist and the best approach to an understanding of his works is to recognize at the outset that he was a very cultivated person who disguised sanity in the guise of the ludicrous in order to make people laugh rather than weep. As one writer said, Leacock possesses "a sense of delicious incongruity; he is shrewd without being bitter, ingenious without being supersubtle, comic without being trivial, and kindly without being uncritical."[10]

The sketches in Literary Lapses are of three kinds: those which are merely light recreational fun or which stem from personal experience; those which are more pointedly directed at certain aspects of the new society, but in which the fun dominates the criticism; and those which show a deep concern over the unrestricted materialism and this concern often pushes the humour into the background.

---

[9] See Introduction, ix-xi.

[10] C.K. Allen, Oh Mr. Leacock! (Toronto, 1925), pp. 7-8.

Of the first type of sketch, perhaps the best known is "My Financial Career" which, as the opening sketch, sets the tone of the book. The sketch involves a young man who is about to place his savings in a bank account, and who is caught in the mechanics of high financing. By mistake he withdraws all the money which he has just deposited and too afraid to admit his error, he puts up a brave front, gathers up the money, and flees from the bank. Because it is a first person narrative, the reader identifies the narrator with the author immediately and feels a certain amount of compassion for his predicament. On the other hand, the reader himself might have been awed by the interior of a bank at some time, and therefore feels slightly superior to the young man in the story who is unable to cope with the intricacies of banking. This story has a great appeal for the young and it is generally through this sketch that they are introduced to Leacock's writings. Although the story may be taken as the expression of a man who distrusted and feared large institutions and was making a plea for the individual who is caught in the mechanism of modern society, it is best appreciated as a simple narrative by a young man for other young persons. As Peter McArthur says:

> The young are always the first to laugh and the last to stop laughing. The mature join in of course but to even the most successful men a bank recalls unpleasant moments .... But the young just let themselves go. Most of them have run a message to a bank or have been inside of one, and they have experienced the same feelings that Leacock expresses so poignantly.[11]

---

[11] Peter McArthur, pp. 131-132. The underlining is that of the present writer.

Of the other stories in this first catagory which are meant solely for pleasure, the best are: "Lord Oxhead's Secret," a parody on aristocratic romances which thrive on surprise endings; "The Awful Fate of Melpomenus Jones," the story of a curate who could not say goodbye and took the only way left to him — he died and "the rushing of his spirit from its prison-house was as rapid as a hunted cat passing over a picket fence";[12] and "Number Fifty-Six," a charming tale of a young man and his laundry bundle. Some of the other sketches in this catagory stem from personal experience. Among these are "Hoodoo McFiggin's Christmas" and "Boarding House Geometry." The first, a burlesque on the conventional Christmas story, is the pathetic tale of a boy who longs for some magical Christmas present, but who receives instead some collars, a pair of braces, a toothbrush and a small family Bible. In a later book, Leacock explained that this was a true incident:

> There is no blame; all parents do it, must do it, in such a crowded family as ours was, with a census that went up each year. But at least let me plead for some one present, however trivial, with the true touch in it of the magic of the mysterious .... My own case I wrote up and wrote off long ago, as a story, Hoodoo McFiggin's Christmas, in my book, Literary Lapses, where it stands as a warning.[13]

Because this story stemmed from a painful experience, the humour in it is closer to tears than to laughter. The plea for a magical touch in the true spirit of Christmas is one which is often found in Leacock's books. The second story, "Boarding House Geometry," is derived from a less painful

---

[12] Stephen Leacock, Literary Lapses (Montreal, 1910), p. 24. All subsequent references will be to this edition, unless otherwise stated.

[13] My Remarkable Uncle, pp. 188-189.

incident which occurred during his college days when he was forced to live in cheap boarding houses. This sketch is really a series of geometric equations, each with its own point. He says, for example, "The landlady of a boarding house is a parallelogram -- that is, an oblong angular figure, which cannot be described, but which is equal to anything,"[14] and "Any two meals at a boarding house are together less than two square meals."[15] The humour depends on the reader's knowledge of geometric propositions and recognizing not the absurdity of the reasoning but the absurdity of the conclusion. The axiomatic style of this sketch suggests the influence of Lewis Carroll's writings on Leacock's early work. At the time that "Boarding House Geometry" was written, Lewis Carroll's Symbolic Logic had just been published. Leacock's experimentations with the various techniques of humour may have led him to this book and he may have modelled this sketch after Lewis Carroll's style. Later on, Stephen Leacock and Lewis Carroll were often mentioned together because of Leacock's remark that he would rather have written Alice In Wonderland than the Encyclopaedia Britannica.[16]

Both Stephen Leacock and Lewis Carroll were by profession teachers of the Sciences: Lewis Carroll of Mathematics, Leacock of Political Economy, and both were writers of humour. Beyond this, the similarity between them ends. In his relations to the grown-up world around him, Lewis Carroll

---

14 Literary Lapses, p. 19.

15 Literary Lapses, p. 20.

16 Stephen Leacock, Preface, Sunshine Sketches, xi.

was entirely humorless, which led him to reply coldly when asked to contribute to a philosophical symposium:[17]

> And what mean all these mysteries to me
> Whose life is full of indices and surds?
> $x^2 + 7x + 53$
> $= 11/3$

Leacock, on the other hand, was a warm person who enjoyed the company of others and who tried hard not to offend other people. Although both Stephen Leacock and Lewis Carroll were shy men, Leacock learned to cover his shyness with a bravado. Lewis Carroll never could.

Because Leacock never wrote any great amount of nonsensical humour except in his earliest writings when he was experimenting with different techniques, the influence of Lewis Carroll on his technique is limited to verbal humour. In two sketches, "That Ridiculous War in the East,"[18] and "A, B, and C,"[19] Leacock's attempt at nonsense writing is most successful. The latter sketch has its basis in the type of mathematical problems which children are set to do at school. By adding a "human touch" Leacock soon turns it into a topsy-turveydom with a logic all its own. The characters in the sketch are A, B, C, and their friend D, of whom Leacock says little work is expected. D himself says:

> "... I'm getting a bit too old and stiff for it, now-a-days, Sir, — just scratch about in the garden here and grow a bit of a logarithm, or raise a common denominator or two. But Mr. Euclid he use me still for them propositions, he do."[20]

---

17 Quoted in Alexander Woollcott, Introduction, The Complete Works of Lewis Carroll (London, n.d.), p. 4.

18 Stephen Leacock, "That Ridiculous War in the East," Grip, XLII (October 6, 1894), 107.

19 Literary Lapses, pp. 118-125.

20 Literary Lapses, p. 122.

As in the best nonsense writing, the words can be taken either at their face value or made to work overtime:

> Soon after I left town, he told me, C had been taken ill. It seems that A and B had been rowing on the river for a wager, and C had been running on the bank and then sat in a draft. Of course the bank had refused the draft and C was taken ill.[21]

Nonsense writing ceases to be such if it takes itself too seriously, as in "A, B, and C after Twenty Years."[22] But on the whole, Leacock did not try to write very much nonsense as such.

In a number of sketches in Literary Lapses, Leacock pokes fun at certain extremities of contemporary life — health fiends, statistics, newspaper columnists, and pseudo-intellectual pursuits of the day. These sketches have undertones somewhat more serious than the first group, but the fun is still the most important thing. The best of these stories are "Saloonio" and "The New Food." In the latter, an unthinking child eats thirteen Christmas dinners in capsule form and promptly explodes. This type of sketch is to be found in many of Leacock's "funny" books.

The sketches in the third catagory are those in which Leacock's concern over the growing materialism and its effect on standards of taste is much deeper and sometimes overshadows the humour. Literary Lapses, in addition to containing some of Leacock's most frivolously hilarious writing, also contains some of his most cutting humour outside of Arcadian Adventures

---

21 Literary Lapses, pp. 122-123.

22 Stephen Leacock, The Dry Pickwick (London, 1932), pp. 151-156.

With The Idle Rich. By comparison to the other sketches in the book, the most severe in its criticism of the new society is "How To Make a Million Dollars," which appeared in a later edition of Literary Lapses. This sketch opens with one of Leacock's classic statements:

> I mix a good deal with the Millionaires. I like them. I like their faces. I like the way they live. I like the things they eat. The more we mix together the better I like the things we mix.[23]

The reader feels immediately the impression of obvious pride and envy on the part of the narrator. Later on, a certain amount of disgust is also evident when he explains how to become a millionaire:

> To be a millionaire you need champagne, lots of it and all the time. That and Scotch whisky and soda: You have to sit up nearly all night and drink buckets of it. This is what clears the brain for business next day. I've seen some of these men with their brains so clear in the morning, that their faces look positively boiled.[24]

Desmond Pacey has pointed out that in this sketch there is obvious satire against exploitation but that the man who is making the accusation is himself one of the exploiters and his words, therefore, are not so much an expression of honest contempt as of disguised envy. There is also satire, he notes, at the expense of those who utter the conventional reproaches against great wealth, who over-simplify the complexity of large-scale finance and merely mouth sentimental platitudes about widows and orphans.[25] Leacock says:

---

[23] Stephen Leacock, Literary Lapses (New York, 1943), p. 35.

[24] Literary Lapses (New York, 1943), pp. 38-39.

[25] Desmond Pacey, "Leacock as a Satirist," Queens Quarterly, LVIII (Summer, 1951), 210.

"And how," I asked pretty cautiously, "did he go at it to get it out of them?"

"Why," the man answered, "he just ground them under his heels, that was how."

Now isn't that simple? I've thought of that conversation often since and I mean to try it. If I can get hold of them, I'll grind them quick enough. But how to get them. Most of the widows I know look pretty solid for that sort of thing, and as for orphans, it must take an awful lot of them. Meantime I am waiting, and if I ever get a large bunch of orphans all together, I'll stamp on them and see.[26]

Besides the implicit criticism, it is the play on words that appealed to Leacock. The sketches in Literary Lapses were written by a youth for other young people. In spite of being his first book of humour, Literary Lapses remains one of his best. There is a freshness in it which still persists, although most of the pieces were written for the moment, and a wide range of subject matter which was to be seen again in many of his books.

The next year Nonsense Novels appeared and again Leacock was apologetic about his humorous writings:

As a Professor of Political Economy in a great university, the author admits that he ought to know better. But he will feel amply repaid for his humiliation if there are any to whom this little book may bring some passing amusement in hours of idleness, or some brief respite when the sadness of the heart or the sufferings of the body forbid the perusal of worthier things.[27]

Although he was apologetic in the Preface, he was extremely proud of Nonsense Novels and always considered it far superior to Sunshine

---

[26] Literary Lapses (New York, 1943), p. 41.

[27] Stephen Leacock, Preface, Nonsense Novels (Montreal, 1911), 7-8.

Sketches.[28] Nonsense Novels was planned as a series of parodies on contemporary best-sellers but Leacock was particularly pleased because each of the stories could stand by itself as a piece of attractive fun.

It is Leacock's view that parody, as an art form, is "a brilliant form of literary criticism drawing attention to literary defects or philosophical fallacies in a way as legitimate or as exalted as a critical essay by a Sainte-Beuve or a Hippolyte Taine."[29] The parody criticizes by reproducing or exaggerating the style, the kind of story, the typical characters or plots that a particular author uses. This art form can be extended, as it is in Nonsense Novels, from the treatment of a single author to a whole genre of writing. Bret Harte in his Condensed Novels did much the same thing. But while Bret Harte does not discriminate between the good and bad, Leacock parodies only the mediocre and inferior.

The first target of attack is the popular mystery story with its air of secrecy and disguise and the brilliant reasoning on the part of the detective. In "Maddened by Mystery: or the Defective Detective," Leacock exaggerates all the conventional devices of the typical detective story in order to show how preposterous many of them are. Some of the devices are: the use of disguises; the need for secrecy in connection with the publicity of the disappearance of a character usually of noble birth, wealth and position; the clues and rewards; the important people connected with the

---

28 Pelham Edgar, p. 183.

29 Stephen Leacock, Humor and Humanity (New York, 1938), p. 52.

incident, one of whom usually has a fortune at stake; and the final brilliant solution of the mastermind detective. But in Leacock's story the detective is defective and it takes him a long time to realize what the reader knows from the start, that the missing personage, the Prince of Wurttemberg, is a Dachshund and not a human being. When he makes this discovery, the detective feels that he has solved the case:

> The portrait was that of a Dachshund.
> The long body, the broad ears, the unclipped tail, the short hind legs — all were there.
> In the fraction of a second the lightning mind of the Great Detective had penetrated the whole mystery.
> THE PRINCE WAS A DOG!!!!
> . . . .
> "I have it, he gasped to his secretary, "the mystery is solved. I have pieced it together. By sheer analysis I have reasoned it out.[30]

It is the powers with which the detective is usually endowed which Leacock is poking fun at. Because the dog in the story has been harmed, the detective offers to impersonate him at a dog show and comes to a ridiculous end:

> The fortune of the Countess was saved.
> Unfortunately as the Great Detective had neglected to pay the dog tax, he was caught and destroyed by the dog-catchers. But that is, of course, quite outside of the present narrative and is only mentioned as an odd fact in conclusion.[31]

Among the other stories in Nonsense Novels, Leacock includes a supernatural swindle, an old-fashioned tale of cannibalism at sea, and a Scottish feud.

---

30 Stephen Leacock, Nonsense Novels (London, 1919), p. 25. All subsequent references will be to this edition.

31 Nonsense Novels, p. 29.

"Caroline's Christmas: or, The Inexplicable Infant" is a burlesque of the conventional Christmas story in which the prodigal child returns to his family in time to save them from ruin. Leacock did not have any sentimental attachment for the Old Homestead, which, in this case, is mortgaged to the hilt. Leacock paints a wonderful picture of the old couple sitting before the fire resigned to the fact that, although the mortgage falls due that evening, they are unable to pay it:

> "Take the book," she said. "Read John, in this hour of affliction; it brings comfort."
> The farmer took from her hand the wellworn copy of Euclid's Elements, and laying aside his hat with reverence, he read aloud: "The angles at the base of an isoceles triangle are equal, and whosoever shall produce the sides, lo, the same also shall be equal each unto each."
> The farmer put the book aside.
> "It's no use, Anna. I can't read the good words to-night."[32]

The sharpest satire in Nonsense Novels is to be found in the rags-to-riches story of Hezekiah Hayloft who discovers that honesty is not always the best policy and that crime does pay. Subordinate in importance to the plots but sometimes equally funny are the characters. There is Marie Mushenough, a sorrowing Super Soul, Guido the Gimlet of Ghent, and Gertrude the Governess who combines all the talents of a Classicist with those of a Mining Engineer. The latter story is perhaps the most amusing in the book.

Nonsense Novels, although its themes were to be repeated in the books which Leacock wrote during the next decade, was never equalled.

---

[32] Nonsense Novels, pp. 186-187.

It is a tour de force in that the humour has lasted in spite of the fact that the originals of the parodies have long since been forgotten.

With the publication of these two books, Leacock's reputation as a humorist was firmly established. He also opened up the field for other writers in Canada for, as was mentioned earlier, up to this time no professor in Canada would have dared to write humour for its own sake and certainly not under his own name. Thomas Chandler Haliburton, a Chief Justice of Nova Scotia, had done so but his motives had been political — he was trying to build up the life and future of his province. Only fifteen years ago, two American writers said:

> [the world] feels that if a thing is funny it can be presumed to be something less than great, because if it were truly great it would be wholly serious. Writers know this, and those who take their literary selves with great seriousness are at considerable pains never to associate their name with anything funny or flippant or nonsensical or 'light.' They suspect it would hurt their reputation, and they are right.[33]

Leacock knew this and was a little surprised at his own success. At first he did not take himself too seriously as a humorist. His first two books were written merely for the sake of making a little extra money to buy the things he could not afford on his salary. He soon discovered, however, that humour is a noble occupation and that beneath his humour was a great deal of wisdom. In his later books he became more conscious of using his humour as a means of correcting human follies and foibles. It was with the publication of his next book that Canadians began to recognize his importance.

---

[33] E.B. White and Katharine S. White, Introduction, A Subtreasury of American Humor (New York, 1941), xviii.

C H A P T E R T H R E E:

SUNSHINE SKETCHES OF A LITTLE TOWN (1912)

In 1911 because of the success of Literary Lapses and Nonsense Novels, Lord Atholstan of the Montreal Star offered Leacock a fairly substantial sum for a series of sketches to be published in the Saturday issues of The Star. The result of these negotiations was the only large commission that Leacock ever received for a fictional job to be done purely for a Canadian audience. B.K. Sandwell in describing the circumstances surrounding this commission says, "I do not know what the figure was, but it was probably not large enough to have interested him a few years later when he was swamped with commissions from American magazines and syndicates; but in 1912 it was adequate and he had a wealth of material which was not suitable for his American buyers and which he was delighted to have a chance of using."[1]

The terms of the commission were that the sketches had to describe the Leacock territory around Orillia and the picturesque personalities who lived there. Most of these sketches started out as after-dinner anecdotes with which Leacock had kept his guests enthralled at parties given at his home in Montreal over a period of years. By the time the offer for a published version was made, the sketches had already been shaped out and polished in the telling and needed very little editing. They appeared on successive Saturdays in the Montreal Star from February 17 to June 22, 1912

---

[1] B.K. Sandwell, "How the 'Sketches' started," Saturday Night, LXVII (August 23, 1952), 7.

and were also syndicated in a number of magazines including Saturday Night during the same year.

Drawing on his knowledge of life in a small town in Ontario, he did not even bother to change the names of the people concerned in the first publication. This got him into a little trouble as he describes in the following letter:

> When I wrote my Sunshine Sketches as a serial story in the Montreal Star (1912) I put George in under the name of George Popley. This and many of the other names were too transparent, such as Judge John McGaw, -- for John McCosh, etc.
>
> A lawyer friend of mine, Mel. Tudhope of Orillia, now Judge Tudhope wrote me a mock letter threatening to sue me for libel against those people. It was only in fun but it led the publishers to think it wiser to alter the names: so in the Book edition they are changed and George Rapley appears under the harmless name of Mullins.
>
> But in my book Too Much College (1939) George appears as George Rapley in the story "Bass Fishing on Lake Simcoe."[2]

Because the people of Orillia did not like the identification of their town with the fanciful Mariposa, Leacock was forced to change some of the names to more innocuous ones. In spite of this the citizens of Orillia could not forgive him for making fun out of their social customs and local politics. Though the sketches are amiable enough on the surface, they are rather sharp in the deliniation of follies and foibles such as were typical of almost any American or Canadian small town of the time. What the Orillians failed to see was that Leacock loved this little town and that no malice was intended -- for Leacock always believed that malice belonged in the same catagory as wit, irony and satire and had no place in

---

[2] Stephen Leacock, "Letter to George Rapley Bunting," dated September 29, 1943. Collection of the Orillia Public Library, Orillia Ontario.

humorous writings. In time pride supplanted wrath, but for the moment his comic exaggeration of life in a small town was too close to the literal truth for the citizens of Orillia to accept or appreciate.

Shortly thereafter, the sketches were published in book form under the title Sunshine Sketches of a Little Town which is perhaps the only truly "Canadian" book Leacock ever wrote. Because of the nature of the original commission for the sketches, Leacock emphasized the specifically Canadian elements of the subject. The book was an immediate success both here and abroad.

The first thing that drawn the reader's attention is the portrait of Mariposa, a typical small town in Canada shortly after the turn of the century, and a composite of many such towns in Ontario which Leacock knew. To the city dweller Mariposa would appear to be a sleepy little hollow too big to be called a village and yet hardly large enough to be considered a town. In the opening pages Leacock sets the pace of the book. He makes the reader adjust his vision so that he can enjoy the hustle and bustle of activity which lies behind the false fronts of the empty main street:

> To the careless eye the scene on the Main Street of a summer afternoon is one of deep and unbroken peace .... In reality, and to those who know it, the place is a perfect hive of activity. Why, at Netley's butcher shop (established in 1882) there are no less than four men working on the sausage machines in the basement .... Of course, if you come to the place fresh from New York, you are deceived. Your standard of vision is all astray .... But live in Mariposa for six months or a year and then you will begin to understand it better; the buildings get higher and higher.[3]

---

[3] Stephen Leacock, Sunshine Sketches of a Little Town (Toronto, 1912), pp. 3-5.

The reader is cautioned, however, that this is not a Utopia. Situated only a hundred miles from a large city, Mariposa is beginning to feel the pressure of the new commercial age which was taking over the country as a whole. Mariposa is not content to remain a sleepy little town but wants to be recognized as a thriving metropolis. Thus when the census taker puts the population figure around five thousand, "it is generally understood in Mariposa that the census is largely the outcome of malicious jealousy."[4] Similarly in its efforts to imitate the big city — such as the Whirlwind Campaign — it can't help becoming ridiculous.

The townspeople are a delightful set of characters, all of whom are heroes in their own way, but not one of them a villain. In Mariposa everyone belongs to everything. On March 17th, they are all Irish, on St. Andrew's day Scots, on St. George's day English, and on July 4th American. All the men belong to the Knights of Pythias, the Masons, and the Oddfellows. As Leacock says, "That's the great thing about the town and that's what makes it so different from the city. Everybody is in on everything."[5] The reader must admit, however, that if he ever met any Mariposans in real life, he would probably find them very dull creatures indeed. But as fiction and under Leacock's hand they emerge as fascinating characters who glow in the sunshine in which he covers them.

---

[4] Sunshine Sketches, p. 5.

[5] Sunshine Sketches, p. 66.

The first person the reader is introduced to is Josh Smith, the two hundred and eighty pound proprietor of the Hotel, who is, without doubt, the most colourful character in the book. Leacock must have been very fond of Josh Smith for he gave him all the choice incidents -- Josh keeps up the spirits of the town by selling liquor after hours, he saves the excursioners on the sinking Mariposa Belle, he prevents the town from being destroyed when the Church burns down, and he wins the county election by an advance report coming from the city. Josh is pictured as a diamond in the rough:

> As for Mr. Smith, with his two hundred and eighty pounds, his hoarse voice, his loud check suit, his diamonds, the roughness of his address and the goodness of his heart -- all of this is known by everybody to be a necessary and universal adjunct of the hotel business.[6]

Josh is a resourceful rogue whose bar would have been closed had he not, in a moment of inspiration, renovated it into a "real French Caff" with an imported "French Chief" whose aristocratic, saturnine countenance leads the patrons to speculate about his noble lineage. By maintaining a fixed price of twenty-five cents a meal, Josh wins over the townspeople and soon has his liquor license renewed for another three years. Later when he enters politics, he runs on a Conservative ticket with a platform of Temperance and Total Prohibition!

In contrast to Josh Smith is Peter Pupkin, a slightly-built young man, who is always trying to make a good impression. He wants to be a hero but in most instances is the one who has to be rescued. Leacock wanted

---

[6] Stephen Leacock, Preface, Sunshine Sketches, xii.

him to be the hero of the book but could not make him come off. There is also Golgatha Gingham, the undertaker, who has the "true spirit of his profession, and such words as 'funeral,' or 'coffin,' or 'hearse,' never passed his lips. He spoke always of 'interments,' of 'caskets,' and 'coaches,' using terms that were calculated rather to bring out the majesty and sublimity of death than to parade its horrors."[7] Golgatha Gingham firmly believes that to associate with the living, uninteresting though they appear, is the only way to secure the custom of the dead.

There is the lovable other-worldly pastor of the Church of England, the Rev. Dean Drone, who finds food for reflection in the Pastorals of Theocritus, and who once preached a very fine sermon on Aeroplanes ("Lo, what now see you on high, Jeremiah Two"). For twenty-five years it has been his ambition to "rear a larger Ark in Gideon. His one hope had been to set up a greater Evidence, or, very simply stated, to kindle a Brighter Beacon."[8] It is obvious that Leacock prefers Dean Drone, impractical though he may be, to the Presbyterian minister in Mariposa. Dean Drone always has the appropriate sermon for the occasion. When young Fizzlechip kills himself because of losses on the stock market, Dean Drone prepares a suitable sermon. But when Jeff Thorpe suddenly makes a great deal of money from stocks just before the funeral, he changes his sermon for fear of offending public sentiment. And when election time rolls

---

[7] Sunshine Sketches, p. 15.

[8] Sunshine Sketches, p. 104.

around he announces as his text, "Lo! is there not one righteous man in Israel?" or "What ho! is it not time for a change?" which is a signal for the Liberal supporters to leave their pews.

The other characters in the book such as Jeff Thorpe, John Henry Bagshaw, Mullins and Mallory Tompkins all play an important part in the story. Leacock had no difficulty inventing characters but he did have difficulty with the plot. He says in the Preface:

> The writing of solid, instructive stuff fortified by facts and figures is easy enough. There is no trouble in writing a scientific treatise on the folk-lore of Central China, or a statistical enquiry into the declining population of Prince Edward Island. But to write something out of one's own mind, worth reading for its own sake, is an arduous contrivance only to be achieved in fortunate moments, few and far between. Personally, I would sooner have written "Alice in Wonderland" than the whole Encyclopaedia Britannica.[9]

In his attempt to create a plausible story, Leacock drew on his experience of small town life and tried to tie the incidents together by means of a love plot. This love story involves Peter Pupkin, the young bank teller whose shameful secret is his wealth, and Zena Pepperleigh, the daughter of a dyed-in-the-wool Tory Judge who, on general principles, dislikes all rich men. This is one of the most tedious episodes in the book. Leacock wanted this episode to be the unifying force of the book, but he realized that he had failed. Sunshine Sketches has in effect two main heroes -- Josh Smith and Peter Pupkin -- and many minor ones; as a result, the continuity of the book is very loose. With regard to the

---

[9] Stephen Leacock, Preface, Sunshine Sketches, xi.

fabrication of plots in general and Sunshine Sketches in particular, Leacock once wrote:

> I wrote this book with considerable difficulty. I can invent characters quite easily, but I have no notion as to how to make things happen to them. Indeed I see no reason why anything should. I could write awfully good short stories if it were only permissible merely to introduce some extremely original character, and at the end of two pages announce that at this point a brick fell on his head and killed him. If there were room for a school of literature of this kind I should offer to lead it....Such feeble plots as there are in this book were invented by brute force, after the characters had been introduced. Hence the atrocious clumsiness of the construction all through.[10]

Because he had desperately wanted this book to centre around a love story and because he was so disappointed with his inability to do so, Leacock never again attempted a full-scale novel. Where other people admired his Sunshine Sketches, Leacock always considered the Nonsense Novels far superior to it.[11] Undoubtedly the reason for this was his failure with the love plot in Sunshine Sketches and his success in making each of the "nonsense novels", in addition to being a literary parody, a story complete in itself.

The plot of the Sunshine Sketches contains some amusing stories drawn from personal experience. When Leacock first came to Orillia in the late years of the last century, it was still the age of the excursion steamer. In "The Marine Excursion of the Knights of Pythias,"[12] Leacock gives a playful account of the "sinking" of the Mariposa Belle.

---

[10] Quoted in Peter McArthur, Stephen Leacock (Toronto, 1923), p. 136.

[11] See Pelham Edgar, "Stephen Leacock," Queens Quarterly, LIII (Summer, 1946), 183.

[12] Sunshine Sketches, pp. 63-93.

The crispness of the early morning air, the excitement of the people boarding the ship, the hustle and bustle of the preparations of the crew, the shouting and the farewells of those left on the wharf -- through these multifarious impressions Leacock gives the feeling that for pure adventure the annual excursion of the Mariposans ranks with an expedition to the South Seas.

Everything seems to be going smoothly until suddenly on the return voyage an emergency arises. The word is passed around the ship that the Mariposa Belle is sinking. The reader had been forewarned that an accident would take place, but for the boat actually to go down is never expected. Yet everyone on the boat seems to be fairly calm about the whole situation. It is at this moment that the paradox is revealed. It seems that when the Mariposa Belle sinks, she merely gets stuck on a reed bank in the lake which is only six feet deep. Nevertheless, rescue work begins. Boatloads of women and children are rowed to safety, a rescue boat from shore arrives with the rescuers themselves exhausted, and then:

> Just as suddenly and saucily as you please, up came the Mariposa Belle from the mud bottom and floated.
>
> FLOATED?
>
> Why, of course she did. If you take a hundred and fifty people off a steamer that has sunk, and if you get a man as shrewd as Mr. Smith to plug the timber seams with mallet and marline, and if you turn ten bandsmen of the Mariposa band on to your hand pump on the bow of the lower decks -- float? why, what else can she do?[13]

---

[13] Sunshine Sketches, p. 92.

The Leacockian tragedy is over and the Mariposa Belle steams safe and sound to the wharf amid shouting and singing. The only one who is made to look foolish is Peter Pupkin, a newcomer to the town, who like the reader did not realize the implications behind the "sinking" of the boat, and tried to save his girlfriend, only to be rescued himself.

Arthur Lower has pointed out[14] that in this chapter Leacock signalizes the passing of an epoch in Canadian history — that period which stood between the early pioneering days and the modern urban civilization. Lower says that Leacock also stole for his home town of Orillia the very "weakness" of its neighbouring town, Barrie. Up to the 1870's, by which time the railway system became a more direct means of communication, steamers were the main source of transportation to and from the back townships of Ontario. After the railway system had displaced them, the steamers were used for pleasure traffic and the period of the Excursion Steamer lasted from approximately 1880 to 1915. When Leacock wrote the Sunshine Sketches, most of the steamers had already disappeared because the internal combustion engine was allowing everyone to make his own excursion. Most of the boats were cut up for timber but only one had the distinction of "sinking". This was the Barrie steamer, The Enterprise, which ran into a mud bank in the summer of 1902. Because in those days Barrie and Orillia were rivals as to the splendour and safety of their own steamers, Lower feels that Leacock stole for his town the very weakness of the Barrie steamer — her death.

---

[14] Arthur Lower, "The Mariposa Belle," Queens Quarterly, LVIII (Summer, 1951), 220-226.

Whatever the actual facts of the incident, Leacock's sketch is a delightful piece of literature. The handling of the technique suggests the work of a mature craftsman. The timing is perfect: the incongruity is spotted by the reader, but the author does not let him in on the secret until just the right moment. On the whole, this episode is a good example of Leacock's humorous technique at its most effectiveness.

It is interesting to notice that although the era of the steamer was not quite over when he wrote this book, he was able to look at it with all the flavour of something loved a long time ago. This is the "divine retrospect" of which he speaks in his later books on humour. In later years he also explained that the disappearance of the steamer on Lake Simcoe left a void for him which could not be filled by modern seaways and ocean vessels:

> Lake Simcoe retains all the peculiar romance that goes with the last of anything. It is the frontier of the sunshine; beyond it is the north.[15]

In "The Marine Excursion of the Knights of Pythias" he writes nostalgically:

> Now and then, too, you could have heard them singing on the steamer — the voices of the girls and the men blended into unison by the distance, rising and falling in long-drawn melody: "O—Can-a-da—O—Can-a-da."
> You may talk as you will about the intoning choirs of your European cathedrals, but the sound of "O Can-a-da," borne across the waters of a silent lake at evening is good enough for those of us who know Mariposa.[16]

And he meant every word of it, for Leacock dearly loved this little town.

---

[15] Stephen Leacock, "The Lake Simcoe Country," The Canadian Geographical Journal, XI (September, 1935), 116.

[16] Sunshine Sketches, p. 83.

In the slightly satiric "Speculations of Jefferson Thorpe," there is a repetition of one of the main themes of Literary Lapses and many other books -- Leacock's distrust of big business and get rich quick schemes. In this episode, Leacock describes the effect on Mariposa of one of the mining booms which were characteristic of the early part of the century. The dupe is Jefferson Thorpe, the laconic barber, who yearns to make a "clean up." Jeff is liked by everyone in Mariposa but he is not considered one of its leading citizens until the mining boom:

> You couldn't, for example, have compared him with a man like Golgatha Gingham, who, as undertaker, stood in direct relation to life and death, or to Trelawney, the postmaster, who drew money from the Federal Government of Canada, and was virtually a member of the Dominion Cabinet.
>
> Everyone knew Jeff and liked him, but the odd thing was that till he made money nobody took any stock in his ideas at all. It was only after he made the "clean up" that they came to see what a splendid fellow he was. "Level-headed" I think was the term.[17]

Jeff's forte is conversation and more particularly conversation about finance and the stock market. When he sees his chance to make some money, he invests in a stock called Northern Star. Everyone in town gets the fever and a Mining Exchange is opened. Jeff's stock takes a drop but he does not lose confidence:

> "There ain't no difficulty to it," he said, "there's lots of silver up there in that country and if you buy some here and some there you can't fail to come out somewhere. I don't say," he used to continue, with the scissors open and ready to cut, "that some of the greenhorns won't get bit. But if a feller knows the country and keeps his head level, he can't lose."[18]

---

[17] Sunshine Sketches, p. 38.

[18] Sunshine Sketches, p. 47.

Jeff's philosophy is sound enough. The stock takes a tremendous leap and Jeff makes his "clean up". But he is not content to rest with his winnings and invests in an unknown commodity, Cuban land stock, which turns out to be a fraud perpetrated by some big city schemers. Leacock does not condemn Jeff for suddenly feeling like a mighty magnet in the financial world when his first investment pays off, because Jeff's motives were sound enough. Jeff wanted the money for his family and for some philanthropic projects. However, Leacock does condemn the fraudulent practices of big business schemers in the large city, as will be seen in Arcadian Adventures With The Idle Rich, where the satire is much harsher.

In "The Great Election of Missinaba County," Leacock shows his knowledge of small town politicking. The previous year, 1911, had seen one of the bitterest elections in Canadian history, in which Laurier and his government had been defeated on the Reciprocity issue. The general Conservative sentiment across the country was that by trading more freely with the United States, Canada would become too dependent on her neighbour for a number of goods and would run the risk of allowing the newly-completed transcontinental railway to become a national debt. Furthermore, the Conservatives felt that Reciprocity would loosen Canadian ties with Great Britain and that in time Canada might be absorbed into the American union. Leacock himself was a Conservative and as he puts it in Sunshine Sketches:

> I only know that it was a huge election and that on it turned issues of the most tremendous importance, such as whether or not Mariposa should

become part of the United States, and whether the flag that had waved over the school house at Tecumseh Township for ten centuries should be trampled under the hoof of an alien invader, and whether Britons should be slaves, and whether Canadians should be Britons, and whether the farming class would prove themselves Canadians, and tremendous questions of that kind.[19]

On January 27, six days after the Canadian Government had passed a limited Reciprocity act, the Orillia Board of Trade passed a resolution declaring the present time inopportune for Reciprocity.[20] Leacock himself stomped East Simcoe district speaking against the idea of Reciprocity. His speeches, forceful and eloquent, were devoid of the slang, colloquialisms, and the easy-going manner of his later public addresses. He was still actively concerned with politics and Reciprocity was a serious business to him.

In the episode dealing with the election in Mariposa, Leacock describes the peculiar complexion of politics in a small town and reproduces on a small scale exactly what happened on the national scene. To give it a lightness of touch, he exaggerates the seriousness of the actual campaign to the point where it becomes a broad farce. He speaks to the reader not as a political thinker, but as an ordinary voter who is confused and awed by the serious implications of the situation. Always able to see the humour in any given situation, Leacock chuckles merrily over the tactics used by both parties to win over the voters.

---

[19] Sunshine Sketches, p. 213.

[20] The Canadian Annual Review, ed. Castell Hopkins, XI (1911), 37.

The two main contenders for the Missinaba seat are John Henry Bagshaw and Josh Smith. Bagshaw, a seedy and long-winded politician, is the Liberal candidate seeking re-election. Leacock says, "The Liberals called him the old war horse, and the old battle-axe, and the old charger and the old champion and all sorts of things of that kind. The Conservatives called him the old Jackass and the old army mule and the old booze fighter and the old grafter and the old scoundrel."[21] When he returns to Mariposa from Ottawa for the election, John Henry Bagshaw goes into the tobacco store and buys two ten-cent cigars and takes them across the road to Mallory Tompkins of the Times-Herald as a present from the Prime Minister. Then with the greatest confidence, he sets about the business of organizing his campaign. When he hears that Josh Smith is going to run against him, the effect is immediate. Leacock makes the following analogy:

> Do you remember, in history, how Napolean turned pale when he heard that the Duke of Wellington was to lead the allies in Belgium? Do you remember how when Themistocles heard that Aristogiton was to lead the Spartans, he jumped into the sea? Possibly you dont, but it may help you to form some idea of what John Henry Bagshaw felt when he heard that the Conservatives had selected Josh Smith, proprietor of Smith's Hotel.[22]

It is obvious from the start which of the two candidates Leacock prefers, because he was exceptionally pleased with the Conservative landslide the previous year. British Allegiance is Josh Smith's motto and he decorates his bar with "British Jacks," orders out the American drinks

---

[21] Sunshine Sketches, p. 221.

[22] Sunshine Sketches, p. 224.

and replaces them with British Beer, Scotch and Irish Whiskey. As additional insurance he puts up pictures of King George, King Albert, and Queen Victoria, dressed in mourning and carrying a harp, a lion and a three-pointed prong!

Leacock likes to make fun out of the humbug on the surface of politics and this sketch is full of this kind of humour. In an interview with some delegates, Josh Smith shows that he has the right amount of finesse for a politician and an open mind:

> "Mr. Smith," said the chairman of a delegation of the manufacturers of Mariposa, "what do you propose to do in regard to the tariff if you're elected?"
> "Boys," answered Mr. Smith, "I'll put her up so darned high they won't never get her down again."
> "Mr. Smith," said the chairman of another delegation, "I'm an old free trader ---"
> "Put it there," said Mr. Smith, "so'm I. There ain't nothing like it."
> "What do you think about imperial defence?" asked another questioner.
> ....
> "What do the Conservative boys at Ottaway think about it?"
> "They're all for it."
> "Well, I'm fer it too," said Mr. Smith.[23]

After a number of election rallies, public meetings, speeches and promises, election day arrives and Josh Smith sends his boys out to vote and keep on voting until they have to quit. Through a pre-mature notice coming from the city, which says that the town has gone solidly Conservative, Smith wins the election. Everybody makes speeches about the importance of this election but Leacock says quietly, "Mr. Smith, of course, said nothing. He didn't have to, -- not for four years, -- and he knew it."[24]

---

[23] Sunshine Sketches, pp. 235-236.

[24] Sunshine Sketches, p. 253.

After all the speechmaking and the celebrations are over, the reader finds himself far away both in time and space from the little town of Mariposa. Just when the reader is beginning to feel really at home in the town, and to understand and like the characters, he is whisked away to the hard leather chairs of the Mausoleum Club in the big city. Once the break is made, Leacock tries to draw the reader back in memory to the little town sleeping in the sunshine, but its real existence is gone, only the memories remain. The return is painful, almost pathetic:

> How vivid and plain it all is. Just as it used to be thirty years ago. There is the string of the hotel 'buses, drawn up all ready for the train, and as the train rounds in and stops hissing and panting at the platform, you can hear above all other sounds the cry of the brakesmen and the porters:
>
> "MARIPOSA! MARIPOSA!"
>
> . . . . .
>
> And as we listen, the cry grows fainter and fainter in our ears and we are sitting here again in the leather chairs of the Mausoleum Club, talking of the little Town in the Sunshine that once we knew.[26]

To apply the term "sentimental" to this last chapter is false. Leacock could have turned this story into a Main Street or a Winesburg, Ohio, had he so desired; but he loved Mariposa with comprehensive tenderness. As it is, Mariposa lives neatly and completely in the memory as the symbol of a nation in transition. Leacock put a genuine creative passion into the composition of this book and the episodes are some of the happiest little sketches in modern English literature. They run blithely along without any real reproach or condemnation on any of the characters or events. These

---

26 Sunshine Sketches, pp. 263-264.

sketches were made for fun and enjoyment. Sunshine Sketches is a distinctive portrait of ordinary Canadians with just enough comic exaggeration to draw attention to their peculiarities. He never glossed over their foibles but he painted them with the spirit of sunshine for as Leacock once said, "in the long run the world can only move with the spirit."[27]

The book then consists of twelve individual sketches held together by the powerful sketch of a Canadian small town and by the author's sense of humour in presenting the various incidents. Leacock had the ability to make the reader smile, chuckle or laugh out loud at the characters and situations he presented but he could not produce a unified plot. The style is, like his best works, simple and colloquial and the tone conversational with the author interrupting himself at various points to clarify a statement or pause over some well-turned phrase. The humour is rich, the characterization vivid and the observation of small town life exact, so that the town and the people come alive.

With the publication of Sunshine Sketches, Leacock's reputation as a humorist was firmly established both at home and abroad. Canadians generally do not have the ability to laugh at themselves but Leacock showed them that his was a noble art. Because he was a financial success, which was the only way for Canadians to judge merit at the beginning of the century, they were impressed with his achievement and subsequently with his art. Mr. Sandwell stated this very well when he said:

---

[27] Stephen Leacock, Last Leaves (Toronto, 1945), p. 90.

> The greatest benefit that he conferred upon Canada was that of demonstrating that a humorist can make money, and that humor is consequently respectable. Before his time no professor would have dared to write humor unless under a pen-name or as a very rare occasional diversion by way of passing time. Leacock, being a great humorist, knew that humor is immensely important and calls for great qualities of mind and heart, and he therefore practised it without shame and without apology; and when Canadians found that he was making a great deal of money at it, and was highly regarded in New York and London, they decided that it must be all right and began to regard him quite highly themselves.[28]

After the publication of this book, Leacock turned his attention towards a wider market and extended the range of his subject matter to suit his audience. Because his Canadian audience was very small in comparison with that in the United States and Great Britain, he was not and could not be interested any longer in the peculiarly Canadian subject. Sunshine Sketches remains the only book he ever wrote solely with his Canadian audience in mind.

---

[28] B.K. Sandwell, "Stephen Leacock, Worst Dressed Writer, Made Fun Respectable," Saturday Night, LIX (April 8, 1944), 17.

C H A P T E R F O U R:

a) ARCADIAN ADVENTURES WITH THE IDLE RICH (1914)

b) LEACOCK, THE CRITIC OF CONTEMPORARY STANDARDS OF TASTE IN LITERATURE (1913 - 1920)

The books which appeared during the next seven years, 1913 to 1920, all deal in some way or other with public morality and more particularly with the effect of corrupt materialism on contemporary standards of taste. He stated the problem as follows:

> Mass economic life compels a new kind of cohesion in which the individual is forced and fitted into a pattern. He can't have any liberty because there is nothing to choose: unless everybody chooses the same, nobody gets anything .... The very scope of our mechanical invention makes us all the more sheeplike .... To what extent humanity can undergo this superimposed layer of sameness without change, is surely an open question: they may change to something better or worse, but hardly remain the same.[1]

Of the books which deal with this problem, the Arcadian Adventures With The Idle Rich is the most consistent in its approach. This book appeared in 1914, two years after the Sunshine Sketches. In Arcadian Adventures Leacock is mainly concerned with the numerous social and economic anomalies which develop from an exceedingly wealthy class of people of a large city in a young and democratic country. This theme, which was first noticed in Literary Lapses and which was again touched upon in Sunshine Sketches, is here developed to a greater degree, both in scope and depth. Whereas Sunshine Sketches might be described as a summer idyll, Arcadian Adventures might be called a winter's tale, for in the latter book Leacock, the critic of society, dominates over Leacock, the maker of fun. Here he is unrelenting in his attack of the destructive influence

---

[1] Humor and Humanity, p. 102.

of modern industrialism, the worship of material success and the effect of these two things upon education, morality and recreation. By pointing out these follies in a humorous way, Leacock linked himself with an old and great tradition.

The setting of Arcadian Adventures is a large fictitious American city named Plutoria. There is a surface identification between Plutoria and Montreal with its wealthy Sherbrooke Street apartment buildings and churches, its university, its St. James Street brokerages and business men's clubs. The use of a disguise here is more than just a practical devise as it was with Mariposa. Leacock wanted to appeal to the widest possible reading public but even more so he realized that many of the things that he had to say in this book applied more readily to large American cities than they did to Montreal. It is interesting to note, however, that Leacock's two most sustained stories, Sunshine Sketches and Arcadian Adventures, took their inspiration from the two places in the world that he knew and loved best — Orillia and Montreal.

Although the tone of the Arcadian Adventures is much harsher than that of the Sunshine Sketches, there are many points of comparison between the two books and they may even be said to represent the two sides of the same coin. It might be interesting to examine some of these points.

The first point of comparison is one which has already been noticed — the surface identification of the fanciful settings of the books with Leacock's home towns. In the opening pages of Sunshine Sketches, he

presents a distinctive portrait of a Canadian small town just after the turn of the century. As the book opens, it is noon in Mariposa on a summer's day and the main street is fairly deserted. Mariposa is a sleepy little town, pleasant but behind the times. Here industry is still a creative art. This tone is sustained throughout the book.

From the title of Arcadian Adventures and from an acquaintance with the earlier book, the reader is led to expect another idyllic picture. He is quite startled, then, by the tone of the opening pages:

> The street in the softer hours of the morning has an almost reverential quiet. Great motors move drowsily along it, with solitary chauffeurs returning at 10:30 after conveying the earlier of the millionaires to their down-town offices. The sunlight flickers through the elm-trees, illuminating expensive nursemaids wheeling valuable children in little perambulators. Some of the children are worth millions and millions .... Here you may see a little toddling princess in a rabbit suit who owns fifty distilleries in her own right. There, in a lacquered perambulator, sails past a little hooded head that controls from its cradle an entire New Jersey corporation.[2]

The immediate impression is that Plutoria is a city of abundant luxury. As is soon evident this wealth is put to poor use and the city has a great deal of artificiality and idleness which pose as industry. Just as Mariposa was soon discovered to be other than a Utopia, so too Plutoria is not a real Arcadia. With the sole exception of Norah, the pathetic little girl in green, and possibly Mr. Tomlinson, the Wizard of Finance, all the shepherds and shepherdesses of this pastoral scene are the "best" members of the city:

---

[2] Stephen Leacock, Arcadian Adventures With The Idle Rich (New York, 1914), pp. 9-10.

And through it all moved the shepherds and shepherdesses of that beautiful Arcadia — the shepherds in their Tuxedo jackets with vast white shirt-fronts broad as the map of Africa, with spotless white waistcoats girdling their equators, wearing heavy gold watch-chains and little patent shoes blacker than sin itself; and the shepherdesses in foaming billows of silks of every colour of the kaleidoscope, their hair bound with glittering head-bands or coiled with white feathers, the very symbols of municipal purity. One would search in vain the pages of pastoral literature to find the equal of it.[3]

This passage is very reminiscent of Leacock's description of the beauties of the excursion of the Mariposa Belle in Sunshine Sketches with this difference that here he is pulling the reader's leg whereas in the earlier book he meant every word of it.

Most of the many characters in Arcadian Adventures are members of the Mausoleum Club who spend their days enjoying the relaxed atmosphere of the club and discussing such important national questions as "the sad decline of morality of the working man, the spread of syndicalism and the lack of Christianity among the mass of the people."[4] Their wives are a bored lot who spend their time in one useless pursuit after another. They take up each new activity and work at it with furious industry until the novelty wears off and then discard it like a broken toy. It is in just such an in-between time that the Yahi-Bahi Oriental Society is formed:

It was indeed a singularly trying time of the year. It was too early to go to Europe, and too late to go to Bermuda. It was too warm to go south, and yet still too cold to go north. In fact, one was almost compelled to stay at home — which was dreadful.

As a result Mrs. Rasselyer-Brown and her three hundred friends moved backward and forward on Plutoria Avenue, seeking novelty in vain. They washed in waves of silk from tango teas to bridge afternoons.[5]

---

[3] Arcadian Adventures, pp. 308-309.

[4] Arcadian Adventures, p. 13.

[5] Arcadian Adventures, p. 126.

Leacock does not condemn the ordinary idle lady but he does condemn those who are bored, those who are suffragettes, and those infringing on scholarly rights. In particular, he does not condone those who are hypocritically ashamed of their husband's wealth and occupation. Most of Mrs. Rasselyer-Brown's three hundred friends fall into one of the above catagories and in the episode of the Oriental Society, Leacock makes fun of their gullibility in spite of sophistication.

In the Sunshine Sketches the humour had been predominantly that of character and the follies of the characters, although never glossed over, were treated gently. In the Arcadian Adventures the humour is mostly that of situation and when that of character, the laughter is harsher. Leacock had a great deal of respect for big business but he disapproved of the smugness of big business men and the idle pursuits of these people. The members of the Mausoleum Club, belonging to the same stratum of society and indulging in the same pastimes, resemble the man in Literary Lapses who made a million dollars by "grinding widows and orphans under his heels." Although Leacock was fascinated by the ability of certain men to amass great fortunes and himself longed for the comforts that money could buy, he was repelled by the kowtowingness to the God of Money that prevailed in the new commercial age. He could not approve of the pursuit of material wealth as the sole motivating force in life and he attacked those who did. But he also attacked those who scoffed at the importance of money in daily life.

The effect of a sudden abundance of wealth introduced on the economy of a young nation affects all human nature in the same way, but in the city the impact is greater. This can be seen from the difference in the incidents involving Jefferson Thorpe in Sunshine Sketches and Mr. Tomlinson, the Financial Wizard, in Arcadian Adventures. Both Thorpe and Tomlinson want to make a great "killing" in order to give their children the things which they themselves never had and in order to become philanthropists. It is because of the latter reason that Mr. Tomlinson encounters Dr. Boomer, the bunkum educationalist of Plutoria University. In this sketch Leacock shows how education in America has become corrupted by big business. He describes Plutoria University as follows:

> The university, as everyone knows, stands with its great gates on Plutoria Avenue, and with its largest buildings, those of the faculty of industrial and mechanical science, fronting full upon the street.
> The buildings are exceptionally fine, standing fifteen stories high and comparing favourably with the best departmental stores or factories in the city. Indeed, after nightfall, when they are all lighted up for the evening technical classes and when their testing machinery is in full swing and there are students going in and out in overall suits, people have mistaken the university, or this newer part of it, for a factory.[6]

Plutoria University is a college where degrees, honorary and ordinary, are granted on the basis of the amount of financial help received from the patron. When Dr. Boomer approaches Tomlinson for help in order to retire the professors and to demolish the older buildings, he offers Tomlinson an honorary degree and admission for his son, Fred, to the faculty of industrial science, although Fred had only completed four years in Cahoga County Section No. 3 School.

---

[6] Arcadian Adventures, p. 80.

Leacock was deeply concerned with the problem of education in the modern world as will be seen in the next chapter. In Arcadian Adventures this subject is treated both seriously and humorously and the reader can sometimes detect a broad grin on the face of the author as he produced this chapter. Take, for example, the incident in which Tomlinson decides to hand over his stocks, which he alone does not know are worthless, to the University:

> "And I'd like to do something, if I could, for Mr. Boomer himself, just as man to man," said Mr. Tomlinson.
> "All right," said Beatem, and he could hardly keep his face straight. "Give him a chunk of the stock — give him half a million."
> "I will," said Tomlinson, "he deserves it."
> "Undoubtedly," said Mr. Skinyer.[7]

When he loses all his stocks, Mr. Tomlinson is quite content to go back to his farm. Like Jeff Thorpe, it is not he but the financiers and educators who have been taken in by his Midas touch. On the whole, however, Jeff is a more likeable character because he is more fully developed than Tomlinson whom Leacock seems to have invented merely to expose the schemers of the city. But as Mr. Pacey says, "the satire here exposes the myth of the 'hard uphill struggle' of which Leacock's plutocrats are fond of talking, and of the supposed 'know-how' which finds itself unmanoeuvered by the simple guilelessness of Mr. Tomlinson."[8] Leacock shows the fickleness of fortune and the precarious position of those who make a great deal of money overnight. He also shows up the parasites who

---

[7] Arcadian Adventures, p. 106.

[8] Desmond Pacey, "Leacock as a Satirist," Queen's Quarterly, LVIII (Summer, 1951), 217.

fasten themselves on the financially successful and then forsake them when their fortune changes. It is obvious that his sympathy lies with such characters as Fred Tomlinson, who rises to the situation when his family is being ridiculed, rather than with such characters as Dr. Boomer and Lucullus Fyshe.

In the episode dealing with the Rival Churches, Leacock shows that even religion is affected by unrestricted capitalism in the big city. To the parishoners of St. Asaph's and St. Osoph's, religious worship depends on the minister who is popular at the moment. When the sketch begins, St. Asaph's is the favoured church. The minister, Rev. Edward Fareforth Furlong, is a young man who bows to the dictates of his wealthy parishoners. He tries to make his sermons as brief and as agreeable as possible and in order not to give anyone a moment's discomfiture, he renames many of the people and places in the Bible, making them appear more in tune with modern life:

> Hell itself was spoken of as She-ol, and it appeared that it was not a place of burning, but rather of what one might describe as mortal torment. This settles She-ol once and for all: nobody minds mortal torment.[9]

Rev. Furlong believes that he is as broad-minded as any clergyman ought to be for "he had no objection to any reasonable use of his church — for a thanksgiving festival or for musical recitals, for example — but when it came to opening up the church and using it to pray in, the thing was going a little too far."[10]

---

[9] Arcadian Adventures, p. 206.

[10] Arcadian Adventures, p. 212.

In contrast to Furlong is Reverend Dr. McTeague, the minister of St. Osoph's and the honorary professor of philosophy at Plutoria University. McTeague is an utter failure because, as one of his parishoners says:

"He is not up to date .... He don't go forward any .... That old man believes just exactly the same sort of stuff now that he did forty years ago. What's more, he preaches it. You can't run a church that way, can you?"[11]

For fifty years he has been trying to reconcile St. Paul and Hegel. When he is stricken with paralysis, McTeague is replaced by Rev. Uttermost Dumfarthing, whose effect is instantaneous. He is Leacock's idea of the modern calvinist preacher who knows how to extract money from his congregation by shaming them into it or by threatening them with eternal damnation. The only one who "understands" him is Juliana, Furlong's sister. She says:

"And I don't see, Edward, how anyone could think him a hard or bigoted man in his creed. He walked home with me to the gate just now, and he was speaking of all the sin in the world, and how few, how very few people, can be saved, and how many will have to be burned as worthless; and he spoke so beautifully. He regrets it, Edward, regrets it deeply. It is a real grief to him."[12]

Juliana's code is one of personal sacrifice as a means of grace. When Rev. Dumfarthing is offered a better position and proposes to her, Leacock makes the reader feel that they richly deserve each other.

When the two churches, St. Asaph's and St. Osoph's merge, the transaction is carried on like a big business deal. The financial end is arranged very quickly. The new corporation is to be known as the United

---

[11] Arcadian Adventures, p. 207.

[12] Arcadian Adventures, p. 246.

Church Limited and the members can frequent either of the churches. The agreement states that "all the present mortgagees will be converted into unified bondholders, the pew rents will be capitalised into preferred stock and the common stock, drawing its dividend from the offertory, will be distributed among all members in standing."[13] The matter of religious doctrine is a little harder to work out but it is also brushed aside after a few memoranda have been written on the subjects of creation, eternal punishment, and the like. Thus, according to Leacock, religion in the big city no longer has anything to do with the faith.

The last incident in Arcadian Adventures, like that of Sunshine Sketches, deals with an election. In the earlier book it was a national election which hung on the reciprocity issue. Here it is a civic election but the issues are less clearly defined. The only thing that is generally known is that everyone is fighting "the cohorts of darkness."

The members of the Mausoleum Club suddenly become aware that the city officials are corrupt and they want to take part in the wave of public morality. They organize a clean-up campaign and energetically set about to rid the city of the evil forces. In reality, they want to change the administration so that they can get their share of government contracts. Their tactics are much the same as those of the Mariposans but, being on a larger scale, seem more corrupt. John Henry Bagshaw had presented Mal Tompkins of the Times-Herald with a ten-cent cigar supposedly from the Prime Minister in order to get the support of his newspaper. But the

---

13 Arcadian Adventures, p. 263.

members of the Mausoleum Club, who are aware that "the cohorts of darkness" can bribe the newspapers, think nothing of buying a newspaper outright. As Dr. Boomer, head of Plutoria University, says:

"There is no doubt that we need more than anything the support of a clean, wholesome, unbiased press that can't be bribed and is not subject to money influence. I think on the whole our best plan would be to buy one of the city newspapers."[14]

To which, Mr. Fyshe replies:

"... I for one am heartily sick of old underhand connections between city politics and the city papers. If we can do anything to alter and elevate it, it will be a fine work, gentlemen, well worth whatever it costs us."[15]

In the course of events it is discovered that the whole city is in favour of the clean-up campaign, even the Mayor and the members of the city council. Men and women organize committees; students band together to put out hoodlumism and disturbance in the streets and in the process upset two street cars and a milk waggon.

On election day the polls are well guarded to insure the citizens' right to vote and to make sure that the right candidates are elected. The result is that all the former officials are reinstated with the exception of two aldermen, Gorfinkel and Schwefeldampf. As in the earlier book, Arcadian Adventures ends with a celebration in honour of the victory. The dance, of course, is held at the Mausoleum Club and is attended by all the shepherds and shepherdesses of this artificial society:

And all night long, within its lighted corridors, the bubbling champagne whispered to the listening rubber-trees of the new salvation of the city. So the night waxed and waned till the slow day broke, dimming with its cheap prosaic glare the shaded beauty of the artificial light; and the people of the city — the best of them, — drove home to their well-earned sleep; and the others, — in the lower parts of the city, — rose to their daily toil.[16]

---

[14] Arcadian Adventures, pp. 293-294.

[15] Arcadian Adventures, p. 294.

[16] Arcadian Adventures, pp. 309-310.

It was stated earlier that the Arcadian Adventures and the Sunshine Sketches are very similar in style and subject matter. Beyond the stylistic device used to open the two books, the characters, and the incidents which have been discussed, there is one further point of resemblance between the two books. This is the transition between the light, genial Sunshine Sketches and the harsher, more critical Arcadian Adventures.

In the epilogue to the Sunshine Sketches the reader is already introduced to the members of the Mausoleum Club and the time is far removed from that of the Sketches themselves. In fact, the time is much closer to that of the later book and this epilogue paves the way for the more severe criticism in the Arcadian Adventures. In it the little town of Mariposa lives only in memory and the author has become part of a different world. Similarly the beginning and indeed the whole of the Arcadian Adventures is concerned only with the contemporary world, and particularly with the effects of rampant materialism on all aspects of life in the city. Because of the structural and thematic resemblances between these two books, together they present a fairly accurate picture of the life of the times. It would, in addition, be safe to suggest from the nature of the transition between them, that Arcadian Adventures grew up in the mind of the author as a natural counterpart to the Sunshine Sketches, before the latter book was finished. For the student of Leacock as a critic of society, then, the two books should be read together. In point of fact Arcadian Adventures is the better book and it is unfortunate that its reputation has been vastly overshadowed by the earlier book.

II

It is beginning to be evident that Leacock was not only a "funny" man, per se. His humour is often a surface covering for a criticism of the society in which he lived. As Arthur Phelps has said, Leacock was one of the more serious Canadian authors:

> Leacock's observation and analysis, embedded with the humour, is often as didactic and tendentious as a Puritan sermon. He was a moralist in the sense that he delighted in the whole of life and had values for the whole. That is being moralist in the high inclusive sense.[17]

The novelists of the early part of the twentieth century saw their country change from a rural one to an industrial one but they sought to ignore this change. As Desmond Pacey says, "Instead of challenging the values of the new industrial society, these writers ignored its existence. Instead of seeking to show how the old ideals could be adapted to the needs of a new generation, they sought merely to turn the clock back."[18]

Leacock alone sought out the pretensions of the new society and tried to put them in such a way that the reader might laugh at them and thereby see the folly in them. In his position as professor of Political Science at a large university in Canada, Leacock had a good vantage point from which to survey the effect of the new materialism on morality, on education, entertainment and culture. He found that the standards of taste in literature, in particular, were shockingly low and he spoke out boldly against this situation:

---

17 Arthur L. Phelps, Canadian Writers (Toronto, 1951), p. 71.

18 Desmond Pacey, Creative Writing In Canada (Toronto, 1952), p. 95.

> The fact of the matter is that despite our appalling numerical growth and mechanical progress, despite the admirable physical appliances offered by our fountain pens, our pulpwood paper, and our linotype press, the progress of literature and the general diffusion of literary appreciation on this continent is not commensurate with the other aspects of our social growth.[19]

During this period, 1913-1920, almost every kind of contemporary literary product came in for Leacock's criticism but he was careful not to knock the good, only the mediocre or inferior. He particularly deplored the practice of writing down to the reader — "The condition of the average reader's mind is such that he can take in nothing but fiction. And it must be thin fiction at that — thin as gruel. Nothing else will 'sit on his stomach.'"[20] Thus, he says, if a writer wants to talk of religion, morality or politics, he must dress it up in a story about the perennial triangle.

Although many of Leacock's burlesques of popular fiction are based on the same kind of stories that were found in Nonsense Novels, the author widens his canvas to include drama, movies and literary criticism.

He directs his criticism against the type of novel which is advertised as "new, fascinating and interesting" because it has been the recipient of some Grand Award. Readers are generally invited to buy the book because it represents the last word in up-to-date fiction and contains either some morally uplifting thought or some penetrating insight, sometimes both:

---

19 Stephen Leacock, Essays and Literary Studies (Toronto, 1916), p. 72.

20 Stephen Leacock, Further Foolishness (Toronto, 1916), p. 231.

> It is well known that the modern novel has got far beyond the point of mere story-telling. The childish attempt to interest the reader has long since been abandoned by all the best writers. They refuse to do it. The modern novel must convey a message, or else it must paint a picture, or remove a veil, or open a new chapter in human psychology.[21]

In "Spoof,"[22] Leacock burlesques both the popular soft tales of young love and the glowing reports which are written about them. He pokes fun at reviewers who use superlatives to prove that the novel contains "one of the most graphic and realistic pictures of the country," and he purposely writes four dull pages of description and statistics about the Geography of the United States. The triangle in the story includes Mr. J. Superman Overgold who philosophizes on "what is life", all the while throwing away money with great abandon but refusing to give any of it away; his wife who is a "starved" woman; and a distinguished Englishman making his first visit to America. The writer, of course, must prove that the novel contains "the most daring and yet conscientious handling of the sex problem and the best psychological analysis of this season's novels." Thus, when in the course of the story, the Englishman asks the millionaire's wife to elope with him, she accepts but insists on taking along her husband, because she has grown to lean on him, and also the second chauffeur, the second footman, and the third housemaid. In absurd fashion, they all leave and it is then that the young hero makes the profound remark which gives the novel its title — "Spoof."

Such outlandish fiction was the vogue among fashionable reading circles of the day and Leacock gives some excellent parodies of this kind

---

21 Stephen Leacock, Moonbeams From A Larger Lunacy (Toronto, 1915), pp. 12-13.

22 Moonbeams From A Larger Lunacy, pp. 11-34.

of fiction. Another example is "Winsome Winnie, or Trial and Temptation,"[23] a throwback to Edwardian literature, but of a type which was still popular in the early part of this century. As in the true melodrama, Winnie is put through a series of trials. She is thrown on the world, then starved, kidnapped, and finally saved by a philanthropic couple whose son turns out to be her unknown rescuer and hero. It is then that she learns that she was not disinherited as she had supposed, but that in her own right, she owns about half of the state of Texas and her trials were merely a method of testing her strength of character. In the end even the villain apologizes to her for his actions. As if the plot in itself were not far-fetched enough, Leacock also burlesques the style -- the elevated tone of the language to coincide with the aristocratic personages, the stilted dialogue of the love scene, the knitting together of the plot, and the painstaking description of the persons and the estate of the benefactors, Lord and Lady Muddlemut.

The newer types of fiction are also burlesqued in "The Snoopopaths, or Fifty Stories in One,"[24] in which many of the typical devices used by contemporary writers are exaggerated to point up their absurdities. A later book, Here Are My Lectures and Stories (1937), contains some of the best literary parodies which Leacock wrote during this period.

His favourite targets of attack are the typical sea story, the irreducible detective story, the resuscitated medieval romance, and the

---

23 Stephen Leacock, Winsome Winnie (Toronto, 1920), pp. 9-42.

24 Further Foolishness, pp. 231-249.

supernatural story -- all of which were first seen in Nonsense Novels. To these he added the political novel centering on some obscure issue, the pre-war war story, and the type of story published in the heart and home magazines.

The best burlesques which appeared during this period are "My Revelations as a Spy,"[25] "Serge the Superman. A Russian Novel,"[26] and "Buggam Grange,"[27] all of which are still very readable. The first of these deals with the international spy story with its deliberate need for secrecy. In Leacock's story, one spy keeps his whereabouts so secret that he spends a month in New York, under the impression that he is in Winnipeg. Because it is a first person narrative, the adventures which are usually portrayed in this type of story seem all the more preposterous and the hero a very boastful person. In this sketch the narrator says that he was personally responsible for the outbreak of the first World War because he took a six weeks vacation -- his first in seventeen years. This piece is still enjoyable because it is modeled after a brand of fiction still in fashion and because of the manner in which Leacock exaggerates both the character and the plot.

The other two burlesques, mentioned above, make fun of stories that depend for their effect on atmosphere, scene setting, or dialogue. Novels which were translated from foreign languages seem to have been popular during the early part of this century. Leacock's burlesque of

---

25 Stephen Leacock, Frenzied Fiction (Toronto, 1918), pp. 9-25.

26 Further Foolishness, pp. 250-280.

27 Winsome Winnie, pp. 227-243.

a Russian novel, which he states was translated from the original by a hand pump, pokes fun at the extremities of the translators of such works and their attempt to make the novel seem more authentic by the use of foreign words:

> Yump, the cook, as she stood kneading the mush, or dough, to make slab, or pancake, for the morrow .... Yump shook her knob, or head, with a look of perplexity on her big mugg, or face.[28]

"Buggam Grange" is a good old ghost story told in the first person by the author who tries matter of factly -- and with the use of an ouija board -- to solve the problem of the ghost who haunts an old English castle. This story, like the popular ones of its type, has its share of atmospheric effects -- bats, poisonous gases, owls, rain, and haunted days. But it also has a quality which has endeared it to readers, one which has made this sketch one of the best that Leacock wrote. Although it is a parody of a type, Leacock still manages to capture the reader's attention from the beginning and makes him want to know what will happen to the characters. In the end the reader is not disappointed.

Besides criticizing the innocuous plots of popular novels, Leacock also pokes fun at the characterization. In "Heroes and Heroines"[29] he shows how the character of the heroine in fiction has changed. He says that in his youth, heroines were only brought in as an afterthought by the author while the hero was kept busy solving some important historical event. Later, the hero was supplanted by the Romantic Heroine of the

---

[28] Further Foolishness, p. 253.

[29] Stephen Leacock, The Hohenzollerns in America (Toronto, 1919), pp. 201-214.

Victorian Age whose greatest charm was her physical feebleness. Then came the Boots and Beef Heroine of the mid-nineties and her hero, the Air and Grass Man. When they also proved unsatisfactory, the hero and heroine were moved indoors once more and the Lure of the City became the popular theme. What the readers now want, he says, is wickedness:

> So the popular novel, despairing of real wickedness among the cannibals, and in the ruined tower at midnight, and on the open-air of the prairies, shifted its scene again. It came back indoors .... Here is the Harvard graduate in his dinner jacket, drunk at one in the morning. Here is the face of Big Business scowling at its desk; and here the glittering Heroine of the hour in her dress of shimmering sequins, making such tepid creatures as Madeline and Kate look like the small change out of a twenty-five cent skinplaster.[30]

This craving for wickedness is supplied by such writers as Mr. and Mrs. Afterthought, to whom Leacock pays an imaginary visit. As the husband explains, his usual plan for writing a novel is "to sit in the stye till I get my characters.... I generally find that a quiet half-hour among the hogs will give me at least my leading character."[31] Then this novelist gets his incidents from a walk among the bees or bulls on his farm. But the most important part of this creative process is the ice-dip at four or five in the morning. From this Leacock concluded:

> We said no more. We have long understood the reasons for our failure in life, but it was painful to receive corroboration of it. This ice question has stood in our way for forty-seven years.[32]

Mrs. Afterthought's method is more exacting. For each new novel she does a complete research study of actual facts. She spends two years

---

30 Hohenzollerns in America, p. 214.

31 Frenzied Fiction, p. 163.

32 Frenzied Fiction, p. 164.

working in a laundry and takes a course in technical steam for her novel on the life of a Steam Laundry Woman, and for her next novel, she is making plans to go to jail.

But just as Leacock pokes fun at all aspects of the popular novel -- the plot, characters, and the fads of the creators -- he also has his say about the society drama, what he calls the up-to-date Piffle Play.[33] Leacock himself disliked people bobbing up in front of him at the theatre and never went unless he could have a front row seat. Lest he be taken too seriously, however, he sheepishly states his qualifications as a drama critic on the basis of the following experience:

> I have acted in Shakespeare as a Citizen. I have been a fairy in A Mid Summer Night's Dream, and I was once one end (choice of ends) of a camel in a pantomime. I have had other parts too, such as "A Voice speaks from within," or "A Noise is heard without," or "A Bell rings from behind."[34]

Sometimes Leacock assumed this pose of naïveté because he wanted his little pieces to be thought of as innocent burlesques. But he also knew them to be truthful expressions of the state of fiction and drama in his day. It must be remembered also that he poked fun only at the mediocre and not at the good. The test of these burlesques now lies in their readability despite the fact that the originals on which they were based have been lost or forgotten. In some of them the criticism is still valid today.

---

[33] Stephen Leacock, Over The Footlights (London, 1923), p. 65.

[34] Stephen Leacock, "The Decline of the Drama," Some Canadian Essays, ed. Norris Hodgins (London, 1932), p. 115.

It is perhaps ironical that Leacock's parodies of current drama were later turned into playlets themselves. In the Preface to one of these playlets, the adapter says:

> Behind the Beyond is intended as a burlesque of that sort of society drama particularly connected with the name of Sir George Alexander. It should be acted with considerable polish and devastating charm. An orchestra, to provide sentimental "selections" in the brief intervals between the "acts," will strengthen the imposture.[35]

In a more serious vein, Leacock himself said that the trouble with modern drama is that "it is becoming a mere mass of conversation and reflection. Nothing happens in it; the action is all going out of it, and there is nothing left but thought. When actors begin to think, it is time for a change. They are not fitted for it."[36] He says that in the modern problem play there is always the husband, the "starved" wife, and the ineffectual, young man. The wife is the most important character — "all that she has is money, position, clothes and jewellery. These things starve any woman. They cramp her. That's what makes problem plays."[37]

The machinery of these plays is more intricate. The play must open with a single person on stage "because if he had been accompanied by

---

35 V.C. Clinton-Baddeley, Preface, Behind The Beyond, adapted from the original by Stephen Leacock (London and Glasgow, 1932). Other playlets which were adapted from Leacock's stories include the following:

V.C. Clinton-Baddeley, The Billiard-Room Mystery (London and Glasgow, 1934).

V.C. Clinton-Baddeley, Winsome Winnie (London and Glasgow, 1932).

V.C. Clinton-Baddeley, The Split in the Cabinet (London and Glasgow, 1938).

Stephen Leacock and Basil Macdonald Hastings, "Q"; a farce in one act (New York, c 1915).

B.K. Sandwell, "Stephen Leacock," Warner Library of the World's Best Literature, XV (New York, 1917), 8928r notes that in 1917 a play, "Sunshine in Mariposa" based on Leacock's Sunshine Sketches was performed.

36 Stephen Leacock, "The Decline of the Drama," Some Canadian Essays, p. 117.

37 Stephen Leacock, Behind The Beyond (New York, 1920), pp. 18-19.

a chorus, that would have been a burlesque; if four citizens in togas had been with him, that would have been Shakespeare; if two Russian soldiers had walked after him, that would have been melodrama. But this is none of these. This is a problem play."[38] At the beginning of the play the proper atmosphere is set with the mention of aristocratic personages and parliamentary proceedings. There is also the symbolical supper scene later on in the play. This is very light and gay and comes just before the undoing of one of the characters. This is the standard formula for a problem play. The last act is always very quiet, observes Leacock. In fact, thirty percent of it is silence. All these things give the problem play the right dimensions. In later books he also pokes fun at the Ibsen drama where the profound problem is stated but not solved; the historic drama which is meant to bring out certain new facets of an important figure's personality; and the new type of Russian drama, like those of Maxim Gorki, in which the characters are all deviants.

The actor as well as the playwright comes in for his share of criticism. The great actor today, according to Leacock, excels in both comedy and tragedy. His face is habitually pensive while his gestures are flamboyant. He does not appear in Shakespeare but Shakespeare appears in him. In one of Leacock's delightful "interviews" with famous people, he meets The Great Actor. This person tells him that his idea of performing Hamlet is to appear in a brown velvet suit and to use unbroken silences

---

[38] Behind The Beyond, pp. 11-12.

in place of the soliloquys in order to convey deeper emotions solely through his facial expressions. He finds that Shakespeare's lines are not really necessary; in fact, they "cramp" him. What the Great Actor of today wants to express is something bigger -- Himself![39]

Other occupations which come in for minor criticism are the discoverers of new poets, the poets themselves, and the writers of movie scenarios. In "Ram Spudd, The New World Singer"[40] Leacock pokes fun at the extremities of certain contemporary poets and the kind of reviews that they receive with their first publication. Ram Spudd typifies all the things which are thought to be desirable in a new poet -- he is a Navajo, uneducated, and belongs to all schools of poetry:

> As a nature poet we doubt very much if he has his equal; as a psychologist, we are sure he has not. As a clear lucid thinker he is undoubtedly in the first rank; while as a mystic he is a long way in front of it.[41]

Similarly by reducing the impossibilities of Tennyson and Wordsworth to a familiar footing, Leacock uses humour as a social corrective against over-sentiment. In his criticism of pretentious Shakespearian criticism, Leacock achieves an almost nonsensical effect. One of the best examples of such a piece is "The Great War as Recorded by Mr. William Shakespeare."[42]

---

39 Frenzied Fiction, pp. 137-146.

40 Moonbeams From A Larger Lunacy, pp. 135-143.

41 Moonbeams From A Larger Lunacy, pp. 136-137.

42 The Dry Pickwick, pp. 67-76.

Leacock's memory reached back to old time melodramas and "Madeline of the Movies" is a classic comment on early cinema. He looks at this form of entertainment with a somewhat sceptical eye. As he explains in the Introductory Note:

> I was born too soon to understand moving pictures. They go too fast. I can't keep up. In my young days we used a magic lantern. It showed Robinson Crusoe in six scenes. It took all evening to show them. When it was done the hall was filled with black smoke and the audience quite unstrung with excitement.[43]

In later books he often condemned the movies as destroying creative humour because they depend on and emphasize only visual humour which must have an immediate shock, but no lasting value.

Leacock also mentions briefly the bookseller and the censor. The art by which the book agent sells his wares is a sort of hypnotism, Leacock claims. The businessman is often the dupe of the agent who makes the customer feel that by buying the books that he is paying homage to the Arts and Letters and that by selling him the books, the agent is a kind of Daniel of Enlightenment. In "The Reading Public, a Book Store Study,"[44] Leacock shows the methods of the typical bookseller catering to a wealthy clientele. Although he may have 10,000 books in stock, the man concentrates on selling only two or three which have been loaded on him by the publisher. The customer, on the other hand, buys his books according to price and novelty. Leacock's criticism of the book-selling industry, however, did not usually take the form of a humorous sketch.

With regard to the censorship of children's literature, Leacock

---

[43] Further Foolishness, p. 133.

[44] Moonbeams from a Larger Lunacy, pp. 37-51.

says that all the terror in the fairy tales exists only for adults. "All the terror that grown-up people see in this sort of story is there for grown-up people only. The children look clean over it, or past it, or under it .... To the children it is just a story -- and a good one -- that's all."[45] To children it is just a bright diversity and all the bloodshed in it represents a painless way in which children can learn about the stern environment of life and death, he says.

The books which appeared between 1913 and 1920, then, deal for the most part with the decay of literary standards among writers and the reading public. Most of these sketches are in the form of parodies or burlesques of contemporary models. The other pieces which appeared in the same books are concerned with topical issues or with some of the other ideas and fashions of the day. These latter sketches are beginning to show their age.

Some of these sketches deal with events on the political scene. Of these, he says:

> Let me say further that in writing of "politics" I am only dealing with the lights and shadows that flicker over the surface, and am not trying to discuss, still less to decry, the deep and vital issues that lie below.
> Yet I will say that vital though the issues may be below the surface, there is more clap-trap, insincerity and humbug on the surface of politics than over any equal area on the face of any institution.[46]

But in his attempt to be funny, Leacock sometimes went overboard as in The Hohenzollerns in America, where he makes fun of historical figures in

---

[45] Stephen Leacock, "Mother Goose-Step for Children," The Forum, LXXIX (March, 1928), 366.

[46] The Hohenzollerns in America, p. 232.

a tactless way. Because he tried to cash in on the anti-German feeling caused by World War I, many of these sketches have lost any of the appeal which they might once have had. In other sketches he deals with events closer to home, such as the latest fads. He also includes the usual number of stories merely to round out the size of a book. These sketches are derived from such daily incidents as a visit with the photographer, travel abroad, or anything that he thought would create some amusement for the reader.

His style during this period varies a great deal. Sometimes he assumes a professorial or editorial guise and places his standards above that of the object; sometimes he adopts an eye of innocence and seems to be entangled in the very contradictions he presents. At times he is cautious and presents the fantastic episodes in the business and social world with the typical understatement of a British humorist; at other times, he is facetious and uses Americanisms to attract readers in that country. Usually he shows a great deal of common sense but the products of this period, with the exception of Arcadian Adventures and Essays and Literary Studies, are less attractive than his earlier books and those which were to appear in the late thirties, after his retirement from McGill University.

By 1920 he was beginning to be conscious of his success as a humorist. The products of this period are representative of both the themes and the quality of the bulk of his writing. For often, and particularly during the time that he was a professor at McGill and a humorous

lecturer undertaking extensive tours, his writing was rushed because he wanted to have a new book out each year. He did not hesitate to repeat some of his favourite tricks, ideas or sketches when inspiration failed. And he often collected material which had previously been submitted to magazines in order to round out a book. He says:

> The prudent husbandman, after having taken from his field all the straw that is there, rakes it over with a wooden rake and gets as much again. The wise child, after the lemonade jug is empty, takes the lemons from the bottom of it and squeezes them into a still larger brew. So does the sagacious author, after having sold his material to the magazines and been paid for it, clap it into book-covers and give it another squeeze.[47]

One of Leacock's earliest critics and biographers, Peter McArthur, felt that it was the publishers and syndicate managers who were doing Leacock the most harm:

> The curse of modern literature is the enterprising publisher. If one book succeeds, every publisher tries to lure or bulldoze the author, and every other author over whom he has influence, to write another book like it that will be a sure winner. And if the harried author cannot do it the enterprising publisher takes whatever book he writes and puts a jacket on it that will fool the public into thinking that it is like the prosperous best seller of the hour.[48]

Yet Leacock himself did not seem to worry about any lasting reputation. As long as his books sold and the financial returns were substantial, he was happy. Later, when he became more concerned with humour as an art form, he also became more conscious of what the pressure of the publisher can do to a literary output, and he said that people get spoiled, or at least damaged, by success.[49]

---

[47] Stephen Leacock, Preface, Moonbeams from a Larger Lunacy, p. 5.

[48] Peter McArthur, pp. 158-159.

[49] Humor and Humanity, p. 176.

The best sketches which appeared during this period are those in which Leacock uses humour as a corrective against the follies in literary fashions of the day. But in such products as Frenzied Fiction, Moonbeams from a Larger Lunacy and The Hohenzollerns in America, where the emphasis is on light, recreational pieces and topical issues, the style is uneven, the humour is often forced, and the exaggeration is overdone.

For the moment he was concerned about money, dreading and fearing the prospect of poverty which had haunted him in his youth. Since writing humour was the best way to avoid this possibility, he felt a certain amount of pride in the fact that he could produce a new book of humour each year. Once a sketch was completed, he rarely changed even a word or phrase. But if he was not pleased with the sketch, it went into the wastepaper basket. As far as publishers' deadlines were concerned, he could turn out the sketches as quickly as they were asked for — he was not harried. There was always a fund of material which had been written for magazines or which he had in his head, ready for the writing down. But the majority of the lighter sketches which appeared during this period lack the polish of his best work -- that which was first built up in conversation. Thus, the books which appeared between 1913 and 1920 do not, for the most part, show any great creative inspiration and many of them do not bear re-reading today.

C H A P T E R F I V E:

a) MY DISCOVERY OF ENGLAND (1922)

b) A DISCUSSION OF LEACOCK'S IDEAS ON THE FUNCTION OF EDUCATION

"Life, we learn too late, is in the living, in the tissue of every day and hour. So it should be with education."

Too much College, p. 19.

Leacock's popularity increased during the twenties and he was in great demand as a public lecturer. His books were eagerly picked up by a large reading public, both here and abroad, and it was during this period that he reached the peak of his financial success. One writer says: "As an economist he started with five hundred dollars a year from McGill and now receives about six thousand. As a humourist he has made up to fifty thousand or so a year but has successfully avoided the accumulation of undue wealth by applying both economics and humour to the stock market."[1] Actually the latter sum is a little exaggerated, but there is no doubt that he did make a great deal of money, of which he had a particular liking, from the sale of his books. The exact figure for his biggest year, 1923, was $39,011.73.[2]

During these years he was constantly asked to give humorous lectures, a job which he did not particularly like. He said that in his youth he had had a fear of doing anything in public; but actually he was probably afraid that people would not laugh with him. Once, when on an ocean trip, he learned a lesson which guided him in his public appearances. He was asked to entertain the crew:

But when my turn came I forgot to say that the remarks were meant to be funny. Later on, when I became a humorous lecturer, I found that if

---

[1] "R.T.L." (Charles Vining), "Stephen Leacock," Bigwigs (Toronto, 1935), p. 91.

[2] Quoted in a letter from Ralph L. Curry of Georgetown, Kentucky to this writer, October 21, 1955. Mr. Curry got his information from tax return forms which he examined at the Leacock estate in Orillia.

you are going to be funny you must always say so.[3]

Leacock gave his first humorous lectures in 1916 in order to raise money for the Belgian refugees.[4] Unlike Mark Twain who always kept a poker face when lecturing, Leacock if he found that the audience was not sharing the fun, often laughed at his own jokes and his infectious chuckle caused others to join in. He says:

> I always try to appear cheerful at my lectures and even to laugh at my own jokes. Oddly enough this arouses a kind of resentment in some of the audience. "Well, I will say," said a stern-looking woman who spoke to me after one of my lectures, "you certainly do seem to enjoy your own fun." "Madam," I answered, "if I didn't, who would."[5]

In 1921 Leacock undertook a very successful lecture tour of England. He claimed that he went at his own expense because "it was felt (or at least I felt) that the time had come when someone ought to go over and take some impressions off England. The choice of such a person (my choice) fell upon myself."[6] He lectured to British audiences on "Frenzied Fiction" and wrote to his agent, Gerald Christie, that his tour "has been most enjoyable and most successful."[7] The result was a new book, My Discovery of England.

My Discovery of England would certainly not be called a funny book by the same standards as Literary Lapses, Frenzied Fiction, or Moonbeams From A Larger Lunacy. In this book there is evident the author's

---

[3] Stephen Leacock,"I Squirm To Recall," Reader's Digest, XLI(July, 1942), 43.

[4] Stephen Leacock, My Discovery of the West (Toronto, 1937), p. 12.

[5] Stephen Leacock, My Discovery of England (Toronto, 1922), p. 192.

[6] My Discovery of England, p. 10.

[7] Stephen Leacock, "Letter to Gerald Christie," dated Paris, December 30, 1921. Collection of the Orillia Public Library, Orillia, Ontario.

personal sense of humour rather than his humorous technique or effects. The only technical device which is used consistently throughout the book is that of the author being entangled in the very contradictions he presents. This is a humour of a higher type than was most characteristic of his earlier work; it does not invite of line by line quotations. Rather it possesses the same geniality and good humour which was seen in Essays and Literary Studies and which became an integral part of the style of his later works.

My Discovery of England is one of those rare books written half in seriousness, half in jest, which sets out to destroy some of the false impressions which travellers attribute to the countries they visit and to take a poke at some of the revered institutions of England and America. In particular Leacock is thinking of celebrities who come over to America and then, without having seen much of the country except for hotel suites and other celebrities, proceed to 'write up' the country in glowing terms. Leacock describes only those things which he can judge from personal experience -- the economics, politics, education, press interviews and prohibition. To each he gives his own inimitable interpretation.

One of the best loved of all Leacock's sketches, "Oxford As I See It," appears in this book. Here Leacock takes a crack at the American system of higher education by showing that at Oxford the student is given a mode of life and thought that is unequalled in America.

He starts off the piece by stating that what he will say in it is the result of actual observation:

> Having twice visited Oxford, having made the place a subject of profound study for many hours at a time, having twice addressed its undergraduates, and having stayed at the Mitre Hotel, I consider myself an Oxford man.[8]

Leacock then proceeds to describe the place as would be done by any celebrity visiting such a well known place as Oxford. But the tone gradually changes. This is no conventional eulogy. Oxford becomes the object of his humour, for Leacock turns his eye of innocence upon it and proclaims that it is surprising that with its lack of organization and deplorable living conditions, Oxford has been able to achieve such brilliant results. The only thing that had changed since the Middle Ages is that the college has allowed women into its studies. He describes the system thusly:

> [the tutor is the most important person] ... what an Oxford tutor does is to get a little group of students together and smoke at them. Men who have been systematically smoked at for four years turn into ripe scholars... A well-smoked man speaks and writes English with a grace that can be acquired in no other way.[9]

Without any noticeable change in style, the sketch becomes more serious and Leacock makes some scathing remarks about modern American higher education. He extols the English system which puts a premium on genius and lets mediocrity and dullness go their way. In passing he notices almost every aspect of higher education -- teaching methods, organization, co-education, examinations and environment. Perhaps his bitterest remark on examinations and modern students is also found in this piece where he says, "Parrots and crows would do admirably in examinations. Indeed the colleges are full of them."[10]

---

[8] My Discovery of England, pp. 99-100.

[9] My Discovery of England, p. 90.

[10] My Discovery of England, p. 105.

But lest his reading public feel that the piece is becoming too serious for a humorist, Leacock again turns to a lighter tone and says:

> If I were founding a university -- and I say it with all the seriousness of which I am capable -- I would found first a smoking-room; then when I had a little more money in hand I would build rooms; then after that, or more probably with it, a decent reading room and a library. After that, if I still had money over that I couldn't use, I would hire a professor and get some text books.[11]

He ends with a quip that Oxford would do well to adopt the American practice of capturing a few millionaires who by becoming the recipient of an honorary degree would become as well her benefactors and supply her with some modern equipment. For students of Leacock's technique, "Oxford As I See It" is a fine example of Leacock's more mature style.

"Oxford As I See It" is one of the best loved pieces of Leacock's writings but it is also important because it deals with a theme which recurred many times throughout his work -- the problem of education in the modern world.

Throughout his life, Leacock was concerned with the problem of education in the modern world and repeatedly wrote on it in either serious or comic fashion. He was well qualified for the task, having been a schoolmaster for ten years and a college professor for thirty-six. During the course of his writing career, he wrote several books exclusively on the problems of secondary and higher education today and often devoted whole sections of his other books to this same subject. Even in his lightest works, he always managed to include one sketch on education and educational

---

[11] My Discovery of England, pp. 113-114.

methods. There is no doubt, then, that education and especially modern educational methods was one of the chief concerns of his life. No study of Stephen Leacock either as a man or artist would be complete without an exposition of his views on this subject.

He had endured ten years as a schoolmaster and he never forgot the misery that accompanied those years. Decrying the teaching profession, he said:

> Being appointed to the position of a teacher is just as if Fate passed a hook through one's braces and hung one up against the wall. It is hard to get down again.[12]

He had started teaching at a salary of $58.33 a month and ten years later he had worked up to a salary of $100.00 a month.[13] He found both the salary and the position unrewarding. His first objection was always that school-teaching was the easiest profession to get into, but the hardest to get out of. "All schoolmasters," he said, "are teachers not because they want to be but because they can't help it."[14] Many of them use teaching as a stepping stone to some other profession but discover that once they have become teachers that they can't find their way out and eventually become lazy and cease caring about the work at all.

On the other hand, those who go into teaching willingly enough develop a kind of inferiority complex because the profession is not highly respected by other people. The school master, he says, is not made to feel that he is 'as good as anyone', "which is one of the things that a

---

[12] Stephen Leacock, College Days (London, 1923), p. 17.

[13] Essays and Literary Studies, p. 164.

[14] Essays and Literary Studies, p. 167.

man has got to be in life if he is to live at all. The teachers weren't. I never was, and never felt I was, in the ten years I was a teacher. That is why later on I spent so many words in decrying school-teaching as a profession, not seeing that school-teaching is all right for those who are all right for it. The thing wrong is the setting we fail to give it."[15]

Although he never said so explicitly, he disliked teaching both while at it and later on even more so because of the extreme fear of poverty which had haunted him in young manhood and which was to remain with him throughout his life. During these ten years he felt as financially insecure as he had been during his youth and always looked back at this period as ten wasted years.

There were a few things which he liked about teaching -- these were the last days of the term and the canings:

> If every day in the life of a school teacher could be the last day but one, there would be little fault to find with it.[16]

His fondest memories of teaching and the one he liked to boast about was the canings:

> Looking back on it, the whole practice of licking and being licked seems to me mediaeval and out of date. Yet I do know there are, apparently, boys that I have licked in all quarters of the globe. I have licked, I believe, two Generals of the Canadian Army, three Cabinet Ministers, and more Colonels and Mayors than I care to count. Indeed all the boys that I have licked seem to be doing well.[17]

Seriously, Leacock believed that education on the secondary level should bring out latent possibilities. He said that the process of

---

[15] The Boy I Left Behind Me, p. 50.

[16] College Days, p. 30.

[17] College Days, pp. 22-23.

education contains as its major elements the acquisition of knowledge and the development of capacity. This process carries with it, as a by-product the formation of moral character, once its principle aim. Two forces, one of compulsion, or discipline, and the other of spontaneity, or the untrammeled development of the human mind, are often in conflict with each other but both are necessary if the process of education is to be successful:

> Education must carry with it, for its own sake, a certain element of external compulsion: but that it is equally vital that it should have as its animating spirit inner compulsion, the prompting of free will, of the desire to know.[18]

Today we cannot leave education to the unaided prompting of the individual's desire to know and the individual's self-interest in knowing, although the curiosity of the human mind should supply the motivating power of its expanding knowledge, he says. But education today is too balanced towards direct compulsion and is lacking in interest for its own sake:

> The ability to think is rare. Any man can think hard when he has to .... But the ability or desire to think without compulsion about things that neither warm the hands nor fill the stomach is very rare.[19]

The remedy is intangible, he says, but he calls for "a quickening of the spirit, a recapture of the soul, a revival of the childhood of man."[20] In The Pursuit of Knowledge he calls for inspired teachers to counterbalance the evil effects of outer compulsion and to aid the unfolding of minds.

---

[18] Stephen Leacock, The Pursuit of Knowledge (New York, 1934), p. 47.

[19] Essays and Literary Studies, p. 19.

[20] The Pursuit of Knowledge, pp. 47-48.

Higher education, especially that on the American continent, is more severely criticized. In "Oxford As I See It" as well as in numerous other essays, Leacock shows his preference for the English system, as was noticed. The English system is aimed at the wide and humane culture of the intellect, regarding the various departments of learning as forming a unity which in turn is needed to appreciate the individual departments. Taken to its logical extremity, this system can get so broad as to become thin but Leacock infinitely prefers this humanitarian approach to that of the American system with its 'refined knowledge.'

The American system, he says, breaks knowledge up into so many divisions and subdivisions that it loses sight of the whole:

> This system contains in itself the seeds of destruction. It puts a premium on dullness and a penalty on genius. It circumscribes that attitude of mind which is the real spirit of learning. If we persist in it we shall presently find that true learning will fly from our universities and will take rest wherever some individual and inquiring mind can mark out its path for itself.[21]

In particular, he condemns the American method of research on the post-graduate level. Modern scholarship, he says, "has poked and pried in so many directions, has set itself to be so ultra-rational, so hypersceptical, that now it knows nothing at all."[22] The real research, he maintains, is done by real specialists after and not as part of their education.[23] In America so many studies have been crowded into the curriculum that the student cannot do everything and consequently much time is wasted. The

---

[21] My Discovery of England, p. 93.

[22] Essays and Literary Studies, p. 26.

[23] Essays and Literary Studies, p. 83.

main trouble is that the universities have been adding to their curriculum without taking away or altering.[24] "Our College study is shadowed and darkened with the gloom of this dull atmosphere of musty traditional prerequisites."[25] There is no way to rearrange it, he says, without sacrificing the main outline of organized education and leaving it a mere chaos of caprice. What he insists upon is a change of spirit, thought and attitude, a more humanitarian approach such as is found in England.

One of the most serious concerns of educationalists has been the influence of the business man on modern education. Leacock first examined this problem in Arcadian Adventures Among the Idle Rich and later discussed it in many of his other books. Prior to this century there was no pressure from the lower classes to dictate the policy of the universities. Thus in the Victorian Age, the universities became the centres of intellectual life, culture and letters. Then came the twentieth-century businessman, whose success and generosity towards the university led to a glorification that almost amounted to an apotheosis:

> In return the Business Man asked nothing from the colleges, and the colleges gave him nothing -- apart from the letters of a degree, by accepting which he kindly uplifted all those beneath him.[26]

The modern benefactor, then, because he was living, expected 'results' from the colleges and hence sprang the introduction of practical

---

[24] Stephen Leacock, "Ills of the Present System of Education Deplored," McGill Daily, XXII (February 10, 1933), 1. See also Stephen Leacock, The Garden of Folly (Toronto, 1924), pp. 161-168.

[25] Stephen Leacock, The Iron Man and The Tin Woman (London, 1929), p. 45.

[26] Stephen Leacock, Here Are My Lectures and Stories (New York, 1937), p. 237.

courses and along with them the advertising of the university through extra-curricular activities. For the physical sciences, the new resources available for research from these bequests was all for the good, but for the liberal arts, this new capital brought disastrous results:

> For real wisdom, -- obtainable only by the few, -- is substituted a nickel-plated make-believe obtainable by any person of ordinary intellect who has the money, and who has also, in the good old Latin sense, the needful assiduity.[27]

The result of this is that which should exist for itself turns into a qualification for something else:

> At present, as I see it, college education is coming to be looked upon as a sort of prelude to life, a little intermission before work and sorrow begin. Broad-minded parents send their boys and girls to college, because -- what else can they do with them?[28]

He protests that education seen as other than an end in itself is meaningless. "All that is best in education can only be acquired by spontaneous interest; thus gained it lasts and goes on. Education merely imposed as a compulsory prerequisite to something else finishes and withers when its task is done. Real education should mean a wonderful beginning, a marvelous initiation, a thorough "smattering", and life will carry it on."[29]

Most of all it must be remembered that Leacock resented the fact that because of financial difficulties, he had had to telescope two years of university study in Classical and Modern Languages into one and then was unable to continue at all. During this time he had to move

---

[27] Essays and Literary Studies, pp. 21-22.

[28] Stephen Leacock, Model Memoirs (New York, 1938), pp. 304-305.

[29] Stephen Leacock, Preface, Too Much College (New York, 1939), vii.

from one cheap boarding house to another and live on a few dollars a week. It took him ten years at a much hated job to get back to his studies at last. For this reason he carried a deep resentment at the seeming wealth of the new generations of students and their casual attitude to learning.

The student today, he says, has drifted away from the single-minded absorption of learning. Instead, the student lives in a whirl of carefree activities and meaningless exams. Leacock feels that co-education is partly responsible for this change in attitude. But Leacock also resented the fact that most people today have adopted the use of the term "college" to refer indiscriminately to schools of medicine, religion, dentistry, banjo and mesmerism.[30] Similarly, the name "professor", one for which Leacock had worked a long time and which he dearly cherished, has become a generic term "indicating the assumption of any form of dexterity, from hair-cutting to running a steam shovel in a crematorium. It is even customary -- I am informed -- to designate in certain haunts of meretricious gaiety the gentleman whose efforts at the piano are rewarded by a per capita contribution of ten cents from every guest, -- the 'professor'."[31] Furthermore, the college professor, the only kind of professor according to Leacock, is often the object of derisive laughter:

> His angular overcoat, his missing buttons, and his faded hat, will not bear comparison with the double-breasted splendour of the stock broker, or the Directoire fur gown of the cigar maker. Nor does a native agility

---

[30] Iron Man and Tin Woman, p. 181.

[31] Essays and Literary Studies, pp. 15-16.

of body compensate for the missing allurement of dress. He cannot skate. He does not shoot. He must not swear. He is not brave. His mind, too, to the outsider at any rate, appears defective and seriously damaged by education. He cannot appreciate a twenty-five cent novel, or a melodrama...[32]

But even this kind of wooly-headed professor has vanished. The new kind of professor is a busy hustler approximating as closely to the business man as he can and his most important function, when not collecting contributions from Old Boys, is his position as controller of exams:

The supreme import of the professor to the students now lies in the fact that he controls the examinations. He holds the golden key which will unlock the door of the temple of learning, -- unlock it, that is, not to let the student in, but to let him get out, -- into something decent.[33]

The professor is not even allowed such feelings as Academic Discontent -- "in the quiet and regulated life of a professor no passion as strong as that can find a place; for the life of a professor passes from middle age to seniority and from seniority to senility within the measured and majestic transit of the harvest moon, passing over the ripened field of corn, and mellowing all that it illuminates."[34] The American professor today has no time to be interested in clever students, only in his particular department. Thus "the everlasting principle of equality has inserted itself in a place where it has no right to be, and where inequality is the breath of life."[35]

Likewise the student of today because he is not able to be a real student, or perhaps because he does not feel the need to, takes it out in 'college life'. Leacock's own unhappy experience has often led

---

[32] Essays and Literary Studies, p. 9.

[33] Essays and Literary Studies, p. 17.

[34] College Days, p. 77.

[35] My Discovery of England, p. 95.

to his picturing college today as solely "comic stuff." In numerous sketches he has shown college students rushing about in rounds of mandolin-playing, rah-rah meetings and dances, with the prospect of exams somewhere in the distant future. Ironically enough, he says, parents are proud of the sacrifice they make in sending their children to college instead of having them go out to work for a living. On the other hand, with the greater emphasis on specialization, academicians complain that not enough time is spent at college.[36] But if the present trend continues, says Leacock, our colleges will no longer be recognizable as seats of learning. At the college of the future, girls will take courses in Social Endeavour with lab periods that involve visiting and testing the samples of department stores and ice-cream parlours, and the boys will elect courses such as Turkish, Music and Religion because they fit into a compact schedule:

> "Oh yes," I said with a sort of reverential respect, "fitting yourself for a position of choir- master in a Turkish cathedral, no doubt."
> "No, no," he said, "I'm going into insurance, but, you see, those subjects fitted in better than anything else."[37]

The genuine student, likewise, will not find a school suited to his needs at the college future. This is illustrated in "Willie Nut Tries to Enter College,"[38] the pathetic tale of a young man who tries to commit suicide because he is refused entrance to various universities on the grounds that he does not have noble blood, own two ponies and a

---

36 College Days, pp. 65-71.

37 Frenzied Fiction, p. 145.

38 Iron Man and Tin Woman, pp. 173-180.

shot-gun, and his character references suggest that he is not the kind of person the American colleges want. But Leacock suggests at the end that the real student can still go abroad for his education:

> It was only after Willie was fortunately resuscitated that a brilliant thought occurred to his parents which put an end to all Willie's difficulties in entering American colleges. They have sent him to Oxford as a Rhodes scholar.[39]

In some of his lighter pieces on education, Leacock pretends to go along with the trend of brightening up education and he proposes such farcical things as a ten-page booklet in which all knowledge has been condensed,[40] correspondence manuals which take nothing for granted,[41] an educational movie about the discovery of America,[42] and a bureau for those who are properly disqualified to find unsuitable employment.[43] In other places he tries to brighten up French, Latin, History and Arithmetic, turning Calcullus into a modern novel with a bright jacket, and he combines poetry with mathematics to make the latter more attractive.

In more serious fashion Leacock discusses the central problem in teaching -- whether to teach by the inductive or deductive method. He explains that it is often easier and more effective to go from the unknown to the known and, in fact, with larger classes today, it is almost impossible to let the child wander about discovering new truths for himself. But

---

[39] Iron Man and Tin Woman, p. 180.

[40] Literary Lapses, pp. 66-69.

[41] Iron Man and Tin Woman, pp. 186-190.

[42] Hohenzollerns in America, pp. 215-231.

[43] Short Curcuits, pp. 122-126.

this method although faster, often leaves the child up in the clouds as he illustrates in this little verse:

> You said one day that all our judgements were
> Synthetically a priori, sir, --
> I never doubted it, I never will.
> I thought so then and I believe it still,
> Yet whisper low into my ear intent
> What did you say that a priori meant?[44]

He once said that "all educations could be divided into splendid educations, thoroughly classical educations, and average educations. All very old men have splendid educations; all men who apparently know nothing else have thoroughly classical educations; nobody has an average education."[45] He himself had had a "thoroughly classical education" at Upper Canada College and at the University of Toronto. But although he often criticizes the strict training of a classical education which allowed nothing of science to enter into it, he still believed that it was the only kind of training because education can only succeed in being practical by not trying to be so:

> The truth is perhaps that a classical education in attempting one thing effects another. In trying to get you imbued with the language and literature of the ancient world....it trains your mind with a hard discipline that fits it for modern life.[46]

In "Homer and Humbug" Leacock pokes fun at classicists:

> My friend the professor of Greek tells me that he truly believes the classics have made him what he is. This is a very grave statement, if well founded... This damaging charge against the classics should not be too readily accepted. In my opinion some of these men would have been

---

[44] College Days, p. 35.

[45] Literary Lapses, p. 66.

[46] Here Are My Lectures and Stories, p. 40.

what they are, no matter what they were.[47]

and plays humbug with the classics:

> This is what I should like to do. I'd like to take a large stone and write on it in very plain writing --
> "The classics are only primitive literature. They belong to the same class as primitive machinery and primitive music and primitive medicine," and then throw it through the windows of a University and hide behind a fence to see the professors buzz![48]

Although he liked to make little digs this way, there is no doubt that he respected the classics and ancient languages in their own place:

> In my college there will be Latin and lots of it, all over the place, with the mystic conspiracy of pretense, the wholesome humbug, that those who see it know what it means.[49]

What he particularly disliked was not the classics but the method of teaching ancient and modern languages. He says, "Greek education... was supposed to fit people to live, Mediaeval education was supposed to fit people to die. Any school-boy of today can still feel the effect of it."[50] And in the same book he says, "I mean it literally and absolutely when I say that I knew more French in the real sense of knowing it when I was a child of six in England than when I was given first-class honours at graduation by the University."[51]

Intrinsically tied up with the problem of teaching method is that of examining acquired knowledge. Indispensable as they are,

---

[47] Behind the Beyond, p. 191.

[48] Behind the Beyond, p. 197.

[49] Model Memoirs, p.176.

[50] Too Much College, p. 10.

[51] Too Much College, p. 86.

written examinations are the curse of modern education. The annual examination colours the outlook of the student towards knowledge. He says that the attempt to gain a high percentage on a written examination defeats its own end because the reality of the subject is lost in the agony of trying to remember it.[52] In elementary mathematics and the like not too much harm can be caused by the written examination, but in the humanities the results are often fatal:

> The underlying truth is that you cannot 'examine' on literature and that you cannot 'teach' literature in any regulated, formal, provable, examinable way without destroying literature itself.[53]

Leacock has often protested that written examinations in literature are useless and that even the great writers such as Shakespeare, Victor Hugo and Anatole France would fail if they had to take American high school examinations in their own languages and on their own works. In some of his light sketches, Leacock has poked fun at written examinations by parodying models used at McGill and other colleges. In one sketch he even goes so far as to suggest that the two words 'Christmas' and 'Examination' are incompatible and that, since Christmas is too old an institution to be changed, examinations should be altered to bring more of the Christmas spirit into them![54] Elsewhere he suggests methods for evasion in examinations such as illegible writing, smearing and crumpling of the paper into a ball, and the use of learned quotations to fool the examiner.[55] Or he suggests that

---

[52] Here Are My Lectures and Stories, p. 50.

[53] The Pursuit of Knowledge, p. 36.

[54] College Days, pp. 113-121.

[55] Stephen Leacock, Funny Pieces (New York, 1936), pp. 3-7.

others might try a trick which he did while at the University of Toronto -- that is -- writing the wrong paper like Ethnology instead of English Philology.[56]

What is needed in any subject and particularly in English Literature, he says, is first the broad outline of the subject and a deep interest in knowing about it, in other words, a "thorough smattering" and not one hundred percent accuracy in accidence and syntax.[57] In addition to written examinations as the test of acquired knowledge, he also questions the usefulness of making pupils spend two hours a day for ten years in the study of rhetoric, syntax and 'schools' of authors:

> This is not English; this is medieval scholastic Latin, out of its setting a thousand years. To understand what the use of English can amount to you must study and admire the performance of the masters; watch Mr. Churchill illuminate two continents with a phrase, inspire the resistance of a nation with a paragraph, or recall the poppies in Flanders Field that keep alive in a stanza the memory of the unforgotten dead.[58]

But, in spite of the evil effects of examinations and the study of rhetorical devices on the appreciation of literature, Leacock does not condemn the whole system of lectures in English literature for "the worst lecture ever given in this University -- and that is saying a great deal -- is better than no lecture at all. We cannot learn and think and enjoy in solitude. All art and literature implies

---

[56] Funny Pieces, pp. 6-7.

[57] The Pursuit of Knowledge, pp. 36-37.

[58] Stephen Leacock, "Why Study English," The Montreal Star, LXXV (April 20, 1943), 10.

a recipient mind and intercourse. The more you share and divide it, the greater it is, and the more for all."[59]

Courses in English Literature are the highest reach of our studies in the humanities[60] and for this reason Leacock spends a great deal of time decrying the teaching of English Literature. Of the many catagories of literature, poetry is the most unteachable and is often spoiled by copious note-taking and memorizing for examinations. To illustrate this, on more than one occasion Leacock showed what happens to a piece of poetry which is dissected. He fully believes that the only way to learn literature is to read it in a snug corner, concentrating on it, and then discussing it in class under the guidance of an "inspired" teacher:

> The true professor of English would be a sort of inspired person, a little silly, fond of reciting and reading aloud, unconscious of time and place, filled with intense admiration and terrific denunciations, admired and pitied by his students. Such a man ... is the inspiration of the classroom, -- he is the spirit of literature itself.[61]

Unfortunately, says Leacock, if such a man could be found he would never be allowed to become a professor because he could never examine. He suggests that a compromise solution would be to make the classroom a forum of discussion and a market place for thought.

On several occasions, Leacock states in a half-joking, half-serious fashion that he would like to show the world what a real university

---

59 Here Are My Lectures and Stories, pp. 57-58.

60 Here Are My Lectures and Stories, pp. 57-58.

61 The Pursuit of Knowledge, pp. 40-41.

could be like. The most important people at this university would be the professors. One dozen men is all that he says he needs, men who each would have his own life work, and who would never have to worry about office hours, committees, and most especially any kind of responsibility to the college authorities. When lecturing, these professors would be magicians arousing such interest and absorption in the subject that the listeners would hurry from the lecture to the library, still warm from thought.[62] Naturally, each professor would have to be the most eminent man in his field and would have to fulfill certain qualifications before he would be allowed to join the staff of this university:

1) He would have to have a complete knowledge of the subject he teaches.

2) He would have to be the kind of person who can instinctively lead his fellow men and inspire them to do what he says and to want to make something of themselves.

3) Most importantly, he would have to be filled with the gospel of strenuous purpose.[63]

At his college the professors would relax on the campus which would encompass fifty acres of wooded ground. A few buildings, a belfry, a dock, a few thousand books and some apparatus would suffice. Within a generation, he says, all the greatest books on the humanities would be coming from his college. As for the studies, he would have nothing of practical subjects such as commerce, medicine or economics except as speculation:

---

62 Model Memoirs, p. 170.

63 Essays and Literary Studies, pp. 163-189.

> The proper studies for my college are history and literature and philosophy and thought and poetry and speculation, in pursuit of which each shall repeat the eager search, the unending quest of the past. Looking for one thing he shall find another. Looking for ultimate truth, which is unfindable, they will learn at least to repudiate all that is false.[64]

Thus it has been seen that education was an important theme in Leacock's writings because he felt that educational methods needed to be improved. In general he believed that students are moved and stimulated to understanding far more by the imagination than by the intellect, more even than by self-interest. The highest ideal of the teaching profession should lie, therefore, in "the allurement of the artistic impulse, the awakening of the creative instinct, which, once aroused, moves of itself, asking no reward."[65]

---

[64] Model Memoirs, p. 173.

[65] Stephen Leacock, Hellements of Hickonomics (New York, 1936), p. 80.

C H A P T E R S I X:

YEARS OF PROSPERITY (1923 - 1935) AND A DISCUSSION OF LEACOCK'S STYLE

In October 1923 Leacock bought his home at 3869 Côte des Neiges Road in Montreal, which was to become the meeting place for both friends and visiting celebrities. The early 1920's were his most prosperous years as far as the sale of his books was concerned, although his personal life was clouded by the death of his wife from cancer in 1925. At the time of her death, Leacock gave a large sum for cancer research and he undertook to raise by his own efforts an amount equal to any that McGill would contribute to that cause. Little did he realize that it was this same disease that would claim his own life. Leacock was also depressed by the fact that his son, Stephen Lushington Leacock, who had been born on August 19, 1915 was not showing signs of normal growth. The year after his wife's death, he took young Stevie to leading specialists in New York and Liverpool, only to confirm what he already knew, that Stevie would never be physically mature. In a series of letters which are now in the possession of the McGill University Library, Leacock describes to a doctor in Montreal the sensitivity of the boy towards the frequent examinations and also his own hopes and fears about his son's health. From that time on, whenever he went on a long trip or a lecture tour, he always took his son with him. In his last years, Leacock tried to make sure that his son would be well provided for after his own death.

Because he now felt financially secure, Leacock began to indulge in many hobbies. In 1927 he built the main house at Old Brewery Bay. It

consists of fourteen rooms, nine fireplaces, five bathrooms, a billiard room in the basement, and three libraries. These libraries housed his collection of books including some 10,000 signed first editions and rare sixteenth-century bindings. Unfortunately, since his death little care has been taken with the estate and many of the books have become mildewed and are now beyond repair.

He enjoyed to the full all the time which he was able to spend at his summer estate and always "left McGill a few days too early and came back a few days too late to suit the university authorities."[1] During the summer he devoted as much time as possible to his favourite pastime, fishing. As he explained in many of his later books, fishing was a form of leisure to be enjoyed either alone or in the company of a few old friends and several bottles of whiskey:

> My fishing is beside a mill-dam, or the remains of what once was one, a place with old beams and fragments of machinery sticking out in the wreckage of a bygone mill; there or along the banks of the stream that feeds the pond; or better still in a motor boat on a lake that is neither wilderness nor civilization, neither multitude nor solitude, with enough bass in it to keep hope alive and not enough to make continuous trouble. For fishing, as I see it, is in reality not so much an activity as a state of mind.[2]

Leacock also took up farming. He never did things in a small way once he got interested in them and he especially enjoyed farming because, unlike his father before him, he did not have to depend on it

---

1 B.K. Sandwell, "Stephen Leacock, Worst Dressed Writer, Made Fun Respectable," p. 17.

2 My Remarkable Uncle, p. 113.

for his living and could take a loss on his crops. He even prided himself on the amount of money he lost at this pursuit. One year it was tomatoes, the next year chicken raising, but never on a sound financial basis. One of his life-long weaknesses was fear and this even entered into his farming activities. J.R. Hale, a friend who lived in Orillia, said that in mortal fear that some neighbourhood animal who liked turkeys might eat his birds, Leacock locked up his turkeys in close confined quarters. In a few days, less than ten out of eighty turkeys survived.[3]

Paradoxically, Leacock kept careful accounts of the amount of feed and other expenses involved in this hobby. In the barn he kept large sheets of bristle board on which he noted daily household routine, the amount of grain the livestock was to get each day, the rotation to weed the garden, and each of the hired men's duties. He loved to entertain and thought of his home as a kind of Dingley Dell but he always knew how much money he spent for this purpose:

> "I find," he once wrote to me, "that from May 1st to May 15th we served 333 meals and they cost 17 cents each for outside supplies; but as many things represent 'stocking up' (having just come up from Montreal) and as inside supplies increase greatly with broilers and vegetables, I hope to get it down to close to 10 cents .... The fowls, eating by the measured pound of food of which I know the cost, are running at about a little over $15 a month: but the hens lay not far from 50 cents a day (20 cents a day cash and the rest we eat) so that they are very nearly feeding the 225 broilers." He enjoyed getting things like this down on paper — farm accounts, house accounts — and called it "putting the college to it." Then he'd forget it all the next day.[4]

---

3 J.R. Hale, "Leacock and Orillia," Orillia Packet and Times (March 30, 1944), 5.

4 Barbara Nimmo, "Stephen Leacock: A Personal Note," in Stephen Leacock, The Boy I Left Behind Me (London, 1947), p. 14.

In Montreal this passion for getting things on paper extended to such things as plotting a course, arranging his lecture schedules, or charting a timetable for Stevie's medicine. He always had a great number of things on his mind and liked to keep it all neat and orderly to leave room for his creative work. He was kept constantly busy with ideas for articles and stories and he liked to get these ideas down on paper as quickly as possible. In a letter to Mr. Irwin of Maclean's with whom he was negotiating about an article on "Can We Abolish Poverty in Canada," Leacock wrote, "I can hit 3500 words to a syllable, knowing it before hand; time, three weeks at longest."[5] Sometimes, it was this very facility which marred his work.

As early as 1920, his reputation had grown to such an extent that he received requests for manuscripts. In reply to such a request from a New York autograph dealer, Leacock answered with characteristic delight:

Montreal, January 31, 1920

Dear Mr. Saunders,

For many years I have kept manuscripts with the feeling that sooner or later such a request as yours must come. I have at present about two barrelsful. The supply far exceeds the demand. So it is with great pleasure that I send you a "chunk" of my writing. It was published, I think, about three years ago.

Very faithfully,
Stephen Leacock.[6]

---

5 Stephen Leacock, "Letter to Mr. Irwin," dated February 5, 1943. Collection of the Orillia Public Library, Orillia Ontario.

6 Stephen Leacock, "Letter to Mr. Saunders," quoted in Percy Ghent, "Leacock Manuscript Sent to Collector with Jovial Note," Toronto Telegram (April 11, 1944). The piece to which Leacock refers in the letter was a periodical essay on educational methods.

Later in 1935 when he heard that the McGill University Library School was preparing a bibliography of his works, he decided not to wait until his death, but at that time he gave McGill a large collection of his manuscripts and having decided on the suitable enclosure for them, he even offered to pay for the needed boxes.[7] On his retirement he gave Miss Hamlyn, a Librarian at McGill, a few pages of his writing and told her to save them because some day they would be worth something. In addition to the collections which he gave to McGill and to the Orillia Public Library, there still remains more than "two barrelsful" at his estate in Orillia waiting to be sorted out.

In the meantime new books kept coming out with regularity but, particularly after his wife's death, there is a noticeable decline in the quality of his work. Although he mixed all the ingredients of humour, the spirit was lacking. The death of his wife and the ill-health of his son greatly affected his work. He later said, "A humorous person, I think, would be apt to be cut more nearly to the heart by unkindness, more deeply depressed by adversity, more elated by sudden good fortune, than a person with but little of that quick sense of contrast and incongruity which is the focus of the humorous point of view."[8]

For a time he did not seem particularly concerned how he wrote, so long as a new book was ready each Christmas. The books which appeared

---

[7] See Stephen Leacock, "Letter to G.R. Lomer," dated March 4,1935. Collection of McGill University Library.

[8] My Remarkable Uncle, p. 151.

in the late twenties and early thirties do not have the sparkle and freshness of the earlier books. Among the books which appeared during this period are: Winnowed Wisdom (1926), Short Curcuits (1928), The Iron Man and The Tin Woman (1929), Wet Wit and Dry Humour (1931) and The Dry Pickwick (1932). In these books, the same themes that were seen in his earlier books are still evident. There was as yet no new note sounded, no maturing of style, and no radical change of subject matter -- with the exception of an increased interest in drinking and Prohibition. He says of one of the books, "This book is compiled in friendly appreciation of Prohibition in the United States, the greatest thing that ever happened -- to Canada."[9] His rebellion against Prohibition, an obsession which coloured much of his later writing, was exemplified by his fondness for his summer estate, which formerly had been the sight of a brewery. He even stopped his subscription to the Orillia Packet and Times because of its stand on Temperance.

In the main, however, Leacock was riding on the continued popularity of his earlier books rather than on the new ones which he produced. Many of his earlier products were translated into foreign languages.[10]

---

9 Stephen Leacock, Introductory Note, Wet Wit and Dry Humour (New York, 1931).

10 A Bibliography of Stephen Butler Leacock, comp. by the McGill University Library School (Montreal, 1935) lists nine different translations in six languages. Since then there have been many more. In 1937 thirteen of his books were published in Russia totaling 271,000 copies, including an edition of Funny Pieces in an edition of 90,000 copies. See Soviet News Bulletin (Ottawa, October 8, 1955),2. In the copy of the Russian edition of Humorous Stories in the Friedman Collection, McGill Library, a holograph note by Leacock states that this edition of 90,000 copies is the largest single edition of any book of his.

B.K. Sandwell says that in each of the score of countries where his translations appeared, the people, although they could not regard him as one of their own, took him to heart in much the same way as they did Charlie Chaplin, and for much the same reason -- his intense and vivid humanity.[11]

Both the British and American publics tried to claim him for their own. In an essay describing the differences between British and American humour, Leacock's observations are especially interesting because in a sense his style is a combination of both:

> The Americans produce humorous writings because of their intensely humorous perception of things, and in despite of the fact that they are not a literary people. The British people, essentially a people of exceptions, produce a high form of humorous literature because of their literary spirit, and in spite of the fact that their general standard of humorous perception is lower. In the one case humour forces literature, in the other literature forces humour.[12]

Like the Englishmen, Leacock poked fun at the vagaries of the business and social world with typical understatement and he enjoyed trying to divert the reader's attention from the nub by dropping it casually. Yet his humour is not as subtle as the best British humour. Like the Americans, he could be facetious on the surface but underneath he laid a foundation of common sense and wisdom. Because of his education and extensive knowledge, what he had to say, if not deep, was usually wiser than that of American humour. Owen Seaman paid him a tribute when he said, "Mr. Leacock's humour is British by heredity; but he has caught something of

---

11 B.K. Sandwell, "Stephen Leacock, Worst Dressed Writer, Made Fun Respectable," p. 17.

12 Essays and Literary Studies, pp. 135-136.

the spirit of American humour by force of association .... He can always say it comes from the other side. But the truth is that his humour contains all that is best in the humour of both hemispheres."[13]

But was Leacock's humour Canadian? In the United States, nineteenth-century humour fostered by naive recitals and lecture tours assumed an important position in the literature of the country. There was a definite consciousness of humour as an American art form. But in Canada there was no such awareness. The humorist must feel a part of the thing of which he is making fun. The Americans had this feeling by the nineteenth century; Canadians are just beginning to have it now. Although Leacock always thought of himself as a Canadian, the sense of at-homeness in his writing extends to the whole North American continent. This is not surprising because it was in the United States that he had most of his readers. Yet he performed a great service to Canada by drawing attention to Canadian literature. Of Canadian humour, he says:

> In the whole domain of humor, we Canadians stand, as we do in all matters of art and aesthetics, as a middle term between what is British and what is American. We cannot fully participate in either .... There is no distinctly Canadian way of being amusing, just as there is no Canadian way of telling a story or writing a song. It is possible to write humorous things about Canada, and it is possible to write humorous things in Canada (I try to do it myself), but there is, in my humble opinion (reached after forty-six years of effort), no Canadian humor.[14]

---

[13] Owen Seaman, Preface, in Stephen Leacock, My Discovery of England, vii.

[14] Stephen Leacock, "On Humor," Maclean's, LXVIII (October 15, 1955), 33.

The only Canadian humorist of any wide reputation before the turn of the century was Thomas Chandler Haliburton, of whom Leacock did not think very highly. Prior to 1923, Leacock did not have any special interest in Canadian humour but when he began his studies for his books on the technique of humour, he read all of Haliburton's works. Of Haliburton's most famous creation, Sam Slick, he says, "Sam Slick, to any candid mind, not forcing admiration, makes pretty dreary reading."[15]

Leacock did not like the idea that he got his style from any one special source -- either British or American. He believed that his style was unique, but he was flattered that his books could be enjoyed in all parts of the English-speaking world. As he said of Charles Dickens in a letter to a friend, "I am certain that Dickens would never have said that he got his style from the (translation of) the New Testament. He had too much conceit to admit that he got it anywhere."[16]

Similarly, when an English critic in reviewing his latest book tried to apply scholarly terms to Leacock's style and tried to dissect the ingredients of his humorous technique, Leacock retorted with mild indignation:

> An English reviewer writing in a literary journal, the very name of which is enough to put contradiction to sleep, has said of my writing: "What is there, after all, in Professor Leacock's humour but a rather ingenious mixture of hyperbole and myosis?"
>
> The man was right. How he stumbled upon this trade secret, I do not know. But I am willing to admit since the truth is out, that it has long

---

15 Stephen Leacock, The Greatest Pages of American Humour (London, 1937), p. 73.

16 Stephen Leacock, "Letter to R.B. Pattison," dated March 26, 1935. Collection of the McGill University Library.

been my custom in preparing an article of humorous nature to go down to the cellar and mix up half a gallon of myosis with a pint of hyperbole. If I want to give the article a decidedly literary character, I find it well to put in about half a pint of paresis. The whole thing is amazingly simple.[17]

For Leacock the writing of humour involved more than a mere knowledge of the tricks of verbal humour. He was a practical writer who adopted a formula which he knew would guarantee him an audience for what he had to say. But he did not like to be judged (especially not by learned critics) merely as a technical humorist. He says that because the result is gay and light, most people have the mistaken idea that the process of creating humour must also be light and gay:

Few people realize that it is much harder to write one of Owen Seaman's "funny" poems in Punch than to write one of the Archbishop of Canterbury's sermons. Mark Twain's Huckleberry Finn is a greater work than Kant's Critique of Pure Reason, and Charles Dickens' creation of Mr. Pickwick did more for the elevation of the human race -- I say it in all seriousness -- than Cardinal Newman's Lead, Kindly Light, Amid the Encircling Gloom. Newman only cried out for light in the gloom of a sad world, Dickens gave it.[18]

In his own writing Leacock tried to be meticulous and exact by selecting the correct adjective, the well-turned phrase and the significant paradox. He had no qualms about using some unusual phrase or idea over again if he thought he could find a more apt place for it. He wrote quickly and easily and had no use for a stenographer because "as he put it, he could think about as fast as he could write. A new view or a new approach and a completed article would go in the waste basket. Just

---

17 Further Foolishness, pp. 294-295.

18 Further Foolishness, pp. 301-311.

good was not enough."[19] Though he developed the necessary technical equipment, this would have been worthless had he not been gifted with an easy conversational manner and an eye for the ludicrous. The important thing is that the style and the man were one, and the most striking thing about both was the "intense and vivid humanity" of which Sandwell spoke.

Leacock enjoyed life and he could communicate his enjoyment to others. The secret of his style was that he created the illusion that he was having an informal chat with the reader and even expected him to interrupt. This puts the reader at his ease and because the reader feels active participation, he relaxes, enjoys himself and then caught unawares, he finds himself laughing out loud. As Leacock says, "I have yet to see the man who announces that he has no sense of humour. In point of fact, every man is apt to think himself possessed of an exceptional gift in this direction, and that even if his humour does not express itself in the power either to make a joke or to laugh at one, it none the less consists in a peculiar insight or inner light superior to that of other people."[20] He found that the best way to appeal to this "inner light" is through an easy conversational manner; and he did so with great success.

Leacock's style was at times more that of the talker than of the writer. At its best, it retains the quality of the spoken word. The

---

19 John Culliton, p. 24.

20 My Discovery of England, p. 224.

style was consciously undistinguished, slippered, loose-buttoned, the very original of the fireside chat.[21] An illustration of this rambling, talkative style at its best is "The Old, Old Story of How Five Men Went Fishing."[22] An essential ingredient of this style is a knowledge of timing and with it, the use of the pause for effect. Because many of the sketches were first built up in conversation, Leacock developed an excellent sense of timing and the use of the pause. When his work was rushed or when he was not particularly interested in the subject, the humour falls flat, mainly because the timing is off. One of the most famous examples of timing and the pause used to effect is the Mariposa Belle Incident in Sunshine Sketches, which was discussed in Chapter Three.

Combined with this natural gift of a conversational style was his idiosyncratic vision. Early in life Leacock discovered that he had that combination of an idiosyncratic vision which can spot the inconsistencies and incongruities of life and a humane spirit which can view these follies with tolerance and amusement. In other words, he possessed that quirk of nature known as a "sense of humour." His early background on the farm as well as the hardships that he endured while he was growing up sharpened his eye for humbug and made him more conscious of the follies and foibles of contemporary society. Leacock cultivated his idiosyncratic vision, as Mark Twain did his, but he also had that largeness of vision,

---

21 G.G. Sedgewick, p. 25.

22 Frenzied Fiction, pp. 206-220.

which Mark Twain did not, that sees things in their true perspective, and understands that the burning questions of today become the forgotten trifles of yesterday. His subject matter had its basis in his knowledge of people and places and in his love of his fellow men. He hated greed and cruelty and he had a fear of power if misused. His humour thrives on the burlesque rendering of personal experiences, on personal discomfiture and the humiliation of the self. In his earlier works, as has been noticed, this was no pose. Later, however, it became a conscious device and this device necessitated his writing in the first person which, in turn, exactly suited his easy conversational manner.

Leacock was well educated but in his humorous writings he knew how to conceal erudition. More importantly, he knew enough to do so. He had the ability to make the most commonplace and the driest of subjects interesting and amusing, and he reserved the right to inject humour into the most serious and the most unexpected points of a discussion. His saving grace was his common sense and his consciousness of both sides of any issue. Sometimes he did not search very deeply, but what he did say was always sensible. Despite his scholarship, he never lost touch with humanity. One writer says, "The mark of a great humorist is that he is saner than other people. Mr. Leacock possesses in excelsis this clear preposterous vision of the medley of imbecilities through which man takes his solemn way from the cradle to the grave."[23]

---

23 Review of Over The Footlights in New Statesman, XXI (August 11, 1923), 528.

In his writing he posed as a philosopher-humorist who was at all times friendly and good-natured and never intentionally malicious. Certain conventions and fashions of the day stifled him, but he always maintained the perspective of a humorist. He caught his neighbour and himself at work and play and by a slightly off-focus lens, managed to get things straight and he made others see the absurdity of their vanities, prejudices, faults and foibles. But he did not progress with the times. There is a great deal of the Victorian in Stephen Leacock.

There are no real villains in his stories, only the typical villains of the day — those of taste and morality — and even these are reduced to their logical absurdity. Leacock's creations are comic stereotypes embodying only one comic virtue or vice, and without shame he frequently uses the old Dickensian trick of describing a character's salient points by the preposterous name he assigns to him. Like Dickens he felt that sounds and syllables carry with them an undercurrent of meaning and the phonetic significance of names in humour is very important. When he wrote his "Transit of Venus,"[24] he first christened the hero Mr. Poynter, but he was not satisfied with this name and before it was published he changed it to Lancelot Kitter. On the whole Leacock's names are more obvious in their associations than are those of Dickens. His stories contain such personages as Dean Drone, Lucullus Fyshe, Miladi Madame La Comtesse Fifine Ross, Dr. O. Salubrious, Med. Mis. Wash.,

---

24 My Remarkable Uncle, pp. 243-263.

Lady Margaret of the Rubber Neck and her daughter, Lady Angela of the Angle Eye. But if he spotted some name which he knew could become the property of the humorist but for which he himself had no use, he sometimes suggested its possibilities to a friend. He wrote to E.V. Lucas:

> I've just come back from Kalamazoo (see Lippincott's Gazetteer Letter K) where as part of my work in lecturing to the teachers of K. I had to attend a Baptist dinner party ... By the way I feel that that word Kalamazoo ought to be of use to you. Thoughts on Kalamazoo, — without really knowing what it is, or where it is, but speculating as to what it must be like from what one hears at 3000 miles away of the United States eh, what? Go to it.[25]

But of all the names which Leacock created, only one, that of Mariposa, is endowed with any kind of permanence. His characters, if found in real life, would be either dull or disgusting but as fiction they are amusing and their antics are enjoyable to watch. As Leacock says in the Preface to Happy Stories:

> All the stories in this book have, or are meant to have, one element in common. They are not true to life. The people in them laugh too much; they cry too easily; they lie too hard. The light is all false, it's too bright, and the manners and customs are all wrong. The times and places are confused.
>
> There is no need, therefore, to give the usual assurance that none of the characters in the book are real persons. Of course not; this is not real life. It is better.[26]

Bruce Murphy says that there are two types of humorous stories, "those that contain laughter-provoking plots and situations and entertaining characters, and those that depend for their effect on burlesque, satire,

---

[25] Stephen Leacock, "Letter to E.V. Lucas," dated November 18, 1923. Collection of McGill University Library.

[26] Stephen Leacock, Preface, Happy Stories (New York, 1943).

or parody."[27] Leacock was successful with both types, preferring to work with short sketches rather than novel length books.

He knew that if a humorous story is to be effective it must suit its audience, for humour is an art depending on recognition. He developed a formula for getting the reader interested in his subject matter. He either presented for the reader's consideration some incongruous statement or made himself the butt of a joke. His opening remarks generally consist of some statement which is either an obvious truth or a complete untruth, but one whose validity seems to have just dawned on him. Sometimes he gets the reader interested by offering some unusual comparison. He then stretches one of the components to its logical absurdity. But lest the other half of the statement be taken as the mean or standard, he breaks it down as well. This method, if used for a serious discussion, warns the reader to avoid dogmatism and snap judgements. If it is used for humorous purposes, there is always some twist to the ending. Leacock never took his subject or his humorous self too seriously and warned others not to either, although he had the greatest esteem for the humorous craft.

The comic does not deceive anyone but there are certain tricks which he must know and use to full advantage. He must know, for example, the use of hyperbole, accepting half-truths as whole-truths and deliberately

---

27 Bruce Murphy, "Stephen Leacock -- The Greatest Living Humorist," Ontario Library Review, XII (February, 1928), 67.

exaggerating certain traits of character. By over-exaggeration, a thing becomes self-corrective. Leacock says, "I have always found that the only kind of statement worth making is an over-statement. A half-truth, like half a brick, is always more forcible as an argument than a whole one. It carries further."[28]

Similarly, the comic must know the use of understatement and Leacock's success is evident in the following examples:

In reality, nothing more is needed for the driving of a golf ball except a straight piece of air two hundred yards long.[29]

For those who are not conversant with bridge I may say that a "rubber" is the name given to the period between drinks.[30]

If a crow had two more feet and no feathers it would be a horse except for its size.[31]

Leacock was famous for his word plays. He delighted in the deliberate misuse of words -- taking them at face value, at converse to face value or extending them into a new meaning. He also liked to disconnect metaphors. He says in one sketch that the way to become a millionaire is to "strike" town with five cents in your pocket:

I've tried it several times. I nearly did it once. I borrowed five cents, carried it away out of town, and then turned and came back at the town with an awful rush. If I hadn't struck a beer saloon in the suburbs and spent the five cents I might have been rich today.[32]

---

[28] Stephen Leacock, Preface, Garden of Folly (Toronto, 1924), x.

[29] Over The Footlights, p. 256.

[30] Here Are My Lectures and Stories, p. 225.

[31] Stephen Leacock, Winnowed Wisdom (Toronto, 1926), p. 14.

[32] Literary Lapses (New York, 1943), pp. 39-40.

His axiomatic statements would by themselves fill an over-sized volume, for Leacock was a master of concision. Leacock says that when he started writing humour in the last decade of the nineteenth century, he hadn't known where to look for material. Later on, "I learned how to let nothing get past me. I can write up anything now at a hundred yards."[33]

He chose his raw material from the people and events around him. Certain types of characters and plots are to be found in almost every one of Leacock's "funny" books. He liked to write about different classes of society, but his greatest pleasure came from poking fun at club men, politicians, faddists and pretentious quacks. One of the constant objects of his mirth was the successful businessman who goes to great lengths to describe his early struggle, the hardships of his youth, his upward climb and the simple tastes which he still managed to retain. All the while this man is telling his story, he is indulging in a seven course meal complete with champagne. This man will never admit that his success is due to the fact that he married the daughter of the boss, an important item which Leacock drops casually. A similar type of businessman found in Leacock's stories is the man who can't get started because he lacks pep and magnetism, his memory is no good, and his diet all wrong. By changing to a simple diet of spinach and watercress, he becomes a dynamic personality. A third type is the "ruined" man who is down to his last few million dollars or the rich man who feels "cramped," "pinched," or "pushed for money":

---

[33] Stephen Leacock, Preface, How To Write, vi.

A man that I respect very much who has an income of fifty thousand dollars a year from his law practice has told me that he finds it absolutely impossible to keep up with the rich. He says it is better to face the brutal fact of being poor. He says he can only give me a plain meal -- what he calls a home dinner -- it takes three men and two women to serve it, -- and he begs me to put up with it.[34]

In particular Leacock likes to write about the cruel tragedies and money problems which the rich have to endure. His stories are full of men who feel that their wealth is a burden, a solemn trust, and consequently never part with it.

Other types of people often seen in Leacock's books are the people who are always knocking their house into shape or the people who bring back antiques from abroad such as clocks with only one hand and leaky teapots or the nature lover who feels cramped in the city and builds himself a country seat with all the modern conveniences of the city. There are many kinds of nature lovers in his stories such as the man who must tell everyone as soon as he spots the first bird or sees the first sign of spring and the man who decides to plant his own vegetable garden. Of the latter type of occupation, Leacock says:

Here, for example, are the directions, as I interpret them, for growing asparagus. Having secured a suitable piece of ground, preferably a deep friable loam rich in nitrogen, go out three years ago and plough or dig deeply .... As soon as last year comes set out the young shoots. Then spend a quiet winter doing nothing. The asparagus will then be ready to work at <u>this</u> year.[35]

---

[34] <u>Further Foolishness</u>, p. 234.

[35] <u>Frenzied Fiction</u>, p. 229.

Other sketches deal more particularly with situations rather than character. In these sketches Leacock, as narrator, sometimes assumes a different personality and sometimes retains his own. Familiar incidents such as a visit to the dentist, photographer, or barber give him ideas for a humorous sketch. Sometimes he indulges in an imaginary interview with a famous general, or with a very up-to-date cave man, or with a Martian who turns out to be a citizen from Marsh, Pennsylvania. Leacock was also fond of making himself the dupe of a supernatural or psychic experience. The idea of talking to Aristotle, Washington or Bunyan appealed to him but in his sketches the only response that he gets from them is that they are happy and everything is beautiful.

In particular Leacock wrote often about "speeding up business." The individual, as he was and is, was a favourite topic and the new efficiency, the passion for statistics, factual information and also the new health plans were a constant source of humorous ideas. During the 1920's and the early 1930's Leacock produced a number of sketches about life in the far future, a subject closely related to the follies of contemporary society as well as the new theories of Socialism and Communism which were being discussed in his day. In two of his more serious books, The Unsolved Riddle of Social Justice (1920) and While There is Time (1945), he outlines the case for private enterprise versus state control, the latter being one of the things which Utopian writers generally predict. Private ownership, Leacock believes, is one

of the greatest incentives to human effort ever known. Socialism, although it might appear to offer certain advantages over Capitalism, only breeds slavery and laziness:

> If we destroy our eyes in the hope of making better ones we may go blind. The best that we can do is to improve our sight by adding a pair of spectacles. So it is with the organization of society. Faulty though it is, it does the work after a certain fashion. We may apply to it with advantage the spectacles of social reform, but what the socialist offers us is total blindness.[36]

The deep passion that underlies Leacock's desire for a regenerated world must be noted, for it was a constant theme of his later works. Leacock was, as Pelham Edgar says, " an advocate of a polity that should reconcile the need of liberal social concessions to oppressed groups with the recognition of the largest measure of individual rights in an organized world. Such idealistic government control he felt to be more than a mere Utopian dream, but he threw only the vaguest hints of the planning which might establish it as a reality."[37]

In his book Afternoons in Utopia Leacock outlines some of the popular conceptions of the Utopian state and he also parodies the conventional pattern of Utopian writings. The first section of the book deals with the orthodox Utopia as presented by Edward Bellamy and his followers. Leacock pokes fun at the manner in which the hero is put to sleep, transported through time and space and then with complete

---

36 Stephen Leacock, The Unsolved Riddle of Social Justice (Toronto, 1920), pp. 75-76.

37 Pelham Edgar, p. 184.

naïveté goes about discovering the wonders of the altered world. As in the conventional Utopia, Leacock's hero on awakening is greeted by a Venerable Being with a majestic beard. This creature is wearing the usual flowing robe and speaks beautiful, but antiquated English, in this case of a Yorkshire dialect. But, says Leacock, "We will introduce the slight, but novel innovation of supposing that the narrator arrives with -- and not, as usually depicted, without -- his brains."[38]

The narrator is not upset by the fact that he has been transported into the strange world and he knows that if he is patient something will happen. In due course the conventional slippered attendant arrives and takes him to the room of the Venerable Being where the narrator is fed with the expected delicacies. He is then escorted on a tour of the city and the developments and changes are carefully explained, but he shows no interest in them because he has read all this before. The love interest is supplied by the daughter of the Venerable Being, who appears in all novels about Utopia. In due course, the narrator wakes up back in his own home, undisturbed by his experience.

Leacock did not have much use for the romantic type of Utopia with its lengthly discussions of currency, wages and labour, prolongation of life, and abolition of war. Leacock's approach to Utopian writings is not so much a rebuke of these far-fetched ideas as a criticism of the fact that insufficient explanation is given for these changes and the author does not have adequate knowledge about his subject. The rest of

---

[38] Stephen Leacock, Afternoons In Utopia (Toronto, 1932), p. 3.

of the book, Afternoons In Utopia, is devoted to the "real" Utopia and how it got that way. Leacock undertakes to show in serio-comic fashion that the real Utopia is not as fanciful as it is generally conceived to be, especially if it is based on some of the practices of his own day. He explains that war will become obsolete for the very good reason that in the near future a war will occur which will end forever the possibility of another such terrifying experience. Afterwards, robots will be used instead of human power, and war itself will become a mere sporting game. Similarly with the lowering of standards of education which he saw in his day, Leacock suggests that colleges as we know them will disappear and the student in the real Utopia will get his education in a less painful way through an injection or a simple operation on his anatomy. When thinking of the growth of specialization in the field of medicine, Leacock suggests that doctors in the real Utopia will be able to reconstruct any or all parts of the human body which are found to be displeasing to its owner. The last section of the book describes the political system in the real Utopia -- an extreme form of the communist state. His picture of life under this system is very black. It is a place where even humour has been outlawed with the exception of that humour which is placed in a joke book authorized by the state. The eventual overthrow of the state suggests that human nature could never live under this kind of system, appealing though it may be at first, and that it needs the freedom of the imagination which it enjoys under democracy.

There is no involved plot in this book but the various ideas are connected by the general scheme -- that of showing that if certain follies in contemporary society are not brought under control, they may eventually lead to a monstrous society beyond and yet within the realm of imagination. On the surface Afternoons In Utopia is a "funny" book, but it is underlined with the same concern over social anomalies which was noticed in his earlier books. For this reason Afternoons in Utopia is better classed as one of Leacock's more serious books.

The aspect of his writing least often discussed is that in which humour and pathos are juxtaposed. This is one of the most difficult forms of humorous writing for the result can be either overly sentimental or humour of the highest type. Pathetic humour in Leacock's works generally deals with the simple realities of life and death or with a personal but painful experience. Usually the humour in it is of a more sombre nature and the expression far from casual. The reader is never warned when to expect such a piece and indeed, it is usually buried deep in a book of light stories, almost as if Leacock deliberately wanted to hide it.

One such piece is "Survival of the Fittest,"[39] the story of an old druggist who because of his will to live and to help others, has transformed in his mind's eye the interior of his shop. Elsewhere Leacock says, "In biology the test of fitness to survive is the fact of

---

39 Moonbeams from a Larger Lunacy, pp. 243-250.

survival itself -- nothing else."[40] In this story it is the desire to live which keeps the tubercular druggist alive. The drug store itself is a relic from the past -- a bell tinkles as the customer enters, the goods are still unsorted and scattered all over the place, and the sealing wax is never handy when it is needed. Across the street there is a modern shop filled with bright lights and bustling with efficiency. Somehow after two months of pushing boxes this way and that, the druggist of the small shop has created in his mind's eye an attractiveness lacking in the modern shop. Leacock ponders on the ability of the warmth of the imagination to create miracles, but he knows that it is the modern shop which will survive. In the end the narrator returns to the little shop and finds it padlocked:

> And they told me, on enquiry, that his journey had been no further than to the cemetry behind the town where he lies now, musing, if he still can, on the law of survival of the fittest in this well-adjusted world.
>
> And they say that the shock of the addition of his whole business to the Great Pharmacy across the way scarcely disturbed a soda siphon.[41]

Two stories with similar themes are "A Study in Still Life. My Tailor"[42] and "Fetching the Doctor."[43] The first tells the story of a man who visits his tailor each year for thirty years and then realizes when the tailor dies that he never really knew him at all. The second is the story of the country doctor who works without modern equipment

---

40 Essays and Literary Studies, p. 57.

41 Moonbeams from a Larger Lunacy, p. 250.

42 Further Foolishness, pp. 214-220.

43 Hohenzollerns in America, pp. 264-269.

to fight single-handed against death. Only his unaided strength and a firm purpose in trying to preserve human life guide him. Like the druggist in "Survival of the Fittest", the doctor in this story is the last of his kind. In each of these men there is a kind of strength, a solidity unvanquished by the inventions of the modern world.

"Fetching the Doctor" is a very descriptive piece which pictures the children going for the doctor in the still of the snow-covered night, the doctor deep in a game of chess but returning with them, working till dawn and then pronouncing "he'll do now." There is a great deal of nostalgia in this piece because it describes the first time that Leacock encountered death:

> The morning dawned and he did not come from the darkened room: only there came to our listening ears at times the sound of a sob or moan, and the doctor's voice, firm and low, but with all the hope gone from it.
>
> And when at last he came, his face seemed old and sad as we had never seen it. He paused a moment and we heard him say, "I have done all that I can." Then he beckoned us into the darkened room, and, for the first time, we knew Death.[44]

"Transit of Venus"[45] and "Simple Stories of Success"[46] both deal with persons in the teaching profession but more in the pathetic than the comical sense. The first story concerns a quiet and extremely shy professor who falls in love with one of his students, but who is afraid to take any kind of initiative and thereby almost loses her. The story ends happily, but close to tears. The second story ends tragically. It deals with a schoolmaster who saves his money in order to study medicine,

---

[44] Hohenzollerns in America, p. 268.

[45] My Remarkable Uncle, pp. 243-263.

[46] Frenzied Fiction, pp. 243-255.

but who is persuaded to invest it all in a lottery ticket. Realizing his folly, he kills himself. Ironically, it is learned that the young man had won the prize after all.

These stories which deal with the realities of life and death and which juxtapose humour and pathos, do not have the casual carefree expression of his usual funny pieces. Although he sometimes offered a light twist to the ending in order to "brighten up" the piece, this twist generally only intensified the pathos of the situation. On the whole, they have an almost Dickensian quality about them. But these sketches are few in number because this was not the kind of product that Leacock's readers expected or wanted from him. Besides, Leacock much preferred to be known as a merry humorist and not a melancholy one like Artemus Ward or Bill Nye, or a poker-faced one like Mark Twain. And yet Leacock knew that humour is often the product of disillusionment. He says:

> This much however, I will admit, that if a man has a genuine sense of humour, he is apt to take a somewhat melancholy, or at least a disillusioned view of life. Humour and disillusionment are twin sisters. Humour cannot exist alongside of eager ambition, brisk success, and absorption in the game of life. Humour comes best to those who are down and out, or who have at least discovered their limitations and their failures. Humour is essentially a comforter, reconciling us to things as they are in contrast to things as they might be.[47]

It is from this last strain that the more mellow humour of his last books was to develop. But he says the final test of a book

---

[47] Stephen Leacock, Preface, Garden of Folly, ix.

is its readability: "the simple test of a book is whether people read it and whether they read it for its own sake; because they want to read it, or for some other reason, such as the vainglory of culture, the author's reputation, or by the attraction of the subject which the title professes to treat. Another excellent test of a book is whether the reader finishes it."[48]

In most of his work Leacock lacked the central passion which produces the greatest form of humour — that emanating from character and dramatic structure. His imagination was such that it worked in small sketches and in amusing and highly original comparisons. But that part of his work will survive which is rooted deep in human character. Because he realized his limitations, Leacock preferred to write only of those things which would have immediate impact. As a result many of his sketches have already lost their sparkle and freshness, and are apt to fade even more as time passes. For this reason he cannot be classed as a humorist in the same catagory as Charles Dickens and Mark Twain. But he was content to be enjoyed for the moment. "It is better," he said, "to take your place humbly and resignedly in the lowest ranks of the republic of letters than to try to go circling round on your own poor wings in the vast spaces of Milton's 'Paradise,' or the great circles of Dante's 'Inferno'."[49]

---

[48] Stephen Leacock, Mark Twain (New York, 1933), p. 126.

[49] Stephen Leacock quoted in J.P. Collins, "Professor Leacock, Ph.D.: Savant and Humorist," The Bookman, LI (November, 1916), 43.

C H A P T E R S E V E N:

a) BIOGRAPHIES

b) RETIREMENT (1936)

In addition to the other books which he published during the early thirties, Leacock also found time during this period to write biographies of his two favourite writers, Charles Dickens and Mark Twain (Samuel L. Clemens), as well as a biography of Abraham Lincoln.[1] In writing about Dickens and Mark Twain, Leacock revealed a great deal about the technique of these two writers, as well as his own. He liked to remark that he was born in the middle of Queen Victoria's reign at a time when "Mr. Dickens was writing his latest book on the edge of the grave while I thought out my first on the edge of my cradle."[2]

Although Leacock admired both these writers, it is obvious from reading his biographies that Charles Dickens was his favourite writer of all time while Mark Twain was his favourite humorist in the technical sense. Leacock had started reading Dickens when he was still at boarding school and before long had consumed all his books and liked them all with the sole exception of The Old Curiosity Shop. He retained his high regard for Dickens all through his life. He says:

> When I was about twelve years old I began to read the "Pickwick Papers," and I very soon decided that Charles Dickens was the greatest writer who ever lived on this earth. I have seen no occasion since to revise that judgement.[3]

---

1 Stephen Leacock, Lincoln Frees the Slaves (New York, 1934). This book is written in the easy narrative style of his more serious works but does not lie within the scope of this paper.

2 My Remarkable Uncle, p. 294.

3 Stephen Leacock, "What I Read as a Child," The Library and Its Contents, ed. Harriet P. Sawyer (New York, 1925), p. 143.

As far as Mark Twain was concerned, Leacock regarded him in a slightly lesser light. Leacock realized that there were similarities in technique between his own work and that of Mark Twain only after publishers had dubbed him the "Mark Twain of the British Empire" on the basis of Literary Lapses and particularly the first sketch in that book, "My Financial Career." Of Mark Twain's entire output there were only six books which Leacock admired: Roughing It, The Innocents Abroad, A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court, Huckleberry Finn, Life on the Mississippi, and Tom Sawyer. But there was no such thing as a poor book by Dickens. "Dickens's books to Dickens's lovers are as whiskey is said to be to the colonels of Kentucky — no such thing as bad ones."[4] He considered that Mark Twain at his best was funny, but that Dickens was great. He says, "One stands appalled at the majesty of such an achievement. In the sheer comprehensiveness of it, no writer in all the world has ever equalled or approached it. None ever will. The time is past."[5]

Of Leacock's two studies of Dickens, Charles Dickens, His Life and Work (London, 1933) and The Greatest Pages of Charles Dickens (Garden City N.Y., 1934), the second is designed for the general reader while the first is meant for the student of Dickens. The latter book discusses in detail the significant incidents in the life of Dickens with a historical approach to the works. Obvious throughout the book is the strong attraction which Leacock felt for Dickens, the man.

---

[4] Stephen Leacock, The Greatest Pages of Charles Dickens (Garden City N.Y., 1934), p. 221.

[5] Stephen Leacock, Charles Dickens, His Life and Work (London, 1933), p. 1.

Mark Twain (New York, 1933) reveals how Leacock felt about being considered a "funny man." Leacock concentrates on certain aspects of Mark Twain's style, such as the eye of innocence, and he treats biographical information through Mark Twain's financial crisies. Although money was always important to Mark Twain, poverty was either one step ahead or behind him throughout his life. He spent his childhood on a Missouri farm unaware of either poverty or affluence and these boyhood days supplied him with some of his fondest recollections in later life. When he had money he squandered it and when he was broke, he knew that he could make more money by being a humorous lecturer.

Both Charles Dickens and Stephen Leacock, on the other hand, grew up in relative poverty and their insecure childhoods had a profound influence on their lives. Money always played an important part with them. The memory of their early days was too deep-rooted for casual expression and led to a great deal of resentment against the people and circumstances which occasioned this misery. But the difference between Leacock and Dickens lies in the fact that Leacock, in spite of financial difficulties, managed to get a good education at boarding school and university, while Dickens had to get his education from the streets and the blacking factories because his parents were forced to overlook his genius.

Biographical material comes into the writings of Dickens and Leacock in dissimilar ways. In the case of Dickens it comes in indirectly through the voice or actions of one of the characters but it is always

there. In one of his biographies, Leacock says, "In all the pictures drawn by Dickens of the pathos of neglected or suffering childhood, there is none more poignant than the picture of little Dickens himself."[6] In the case of Leacock autobiographical material of the most personal kind is left out almost entirely, although he frequently mentions the lighter episodes or everyday adventures. His unfinished autobiography, The Boy I Left Behind Me, gives some indication of the misery of his early years. Thus when he writes of the childhood of Dickens, Leacock shows a great deal of understanding and sympathy for the efforts of the young Dickens to better himself. As for Mark Twain, it is quite clear that Leacock could not always condone his actions, particularly his casual attitude to money matters.

All three writers were also public lecturers. When Charles Dickens first came to America to lecture, he was too bitter about his copyrights really to see the country. Likewise, Mark Twain could only see Europe from a vantage point west of the Mississippi. Leacock on the other hand, although he had an eye for the humbug, saw the country he was visiting in a relative way, praising it where it deserved it and criticizing where he felt it was justified. He always saw things relatively and judged fairly.

With regard to the platform style of these writers, Leacock says of Dickens:

---

6 Charles Dickens, His Life and Work, p. 2.

> It was a sort of mesmeric rendition of his works -- with voice and words and gesture to aid in the illusion. Of the effect there is no doubt: the public was carried away in gales of laughter ... and were melted into tears.[7]

Leacock also believed in mesmerizing his audience but he did so, as was discussed in Chapter Five, by his infectious laugh which often punctured his talk and which invited others to join with him in the merriment. Mark Twain's technique was entirely different. He disliked public lectures but forced himself to give them in order to keep away the mounting debts which were always hounding him. On the public platform, Mark Twain was poker-faced. His idea of telling a story was that it be told gravely with the teller doing his best to conceal the fact that he even dimly suspects that there is anything funny about it.[8] Leacock much preferred the method of Dickens:

> All people realize, as soon as they start to think about it, that there are two schools of humorous performers, the solemn and the hilarious -- those who invite laughter by their own solemnity and those who seek it by infection from their own. There is no doubt that the latter is in general the harder task and the higher art. Anyone can be solemn, if only with his own stage misery. But let anyone try to come forward with a little merry, spontaneous laughter, and he will soon see how hard is the technique.[9]

As technical humorists, Leacock preferred Mark Twain over Charles Dickens. He says:

---

7 The Greatest Pages of Charles Dickens, p. 199.

8 Mark Twain, How To Tell a Story and Other Essays (New York, n.d.), p. 8.

9 The Greatest Pages of American Humour, pp. 98-99.

Mark Twain was beyond anybody in the world a technical humorist. He combined the basis of the matter -- the inspiration -- with the mechanism of it. He brings into play, far more than Dickens, the resources of technique, the surprise of words, the shifting dexterity of form. Hence it comes that Mark Twain can be quoted in single sentences, Dickens mostly only in pages. Dickens, both for humour and pathos, must move along on a full flood tide of words. Mark Twain can make a splash even in a puddle.[10]

Both Charles Dickens and Mark Twain are relatively free of the cheaper effects of verbal humour. Dickens's characteristic technique of verbal humour is one of queer comparisons. He likes to play with words in their double sense -- sometimes by a direct visual likeness and sometimes by a more subtle likeness of thought. Leacock especially admires this effect in Dickens's writing:

Dickens has an extraordinary gift for seeing likenesses between everything and everything else, especially between animate and inanimate objects: for him clocks wink, jugs grin, clothes dance and whisper on the clothesline, talking to the wind. Often he has line upon line and paragraph upon paragraph of these comparisons.[11]

Mark Twain's characteristic technique of verbal humour is one in which words are extended into a new application. Mark Twain also found and created delight in the misuse of words, not by himself but by his characters, where a sound seems to convey the right meaning but does not. Leacock's favourite technique is to make words and phrases rush into a significance involving a complete impossibility and at the same time to make the sense emerge from the very incongruity of the fact that

---

10 Stephen Leacock, Humor: Its Theory and Technique (Toronto, 1935), p. 100.

11 Stephen Leacock, "Two Humorists:Charles Dickens and Mark Twain," Yale Review, XXIV (September, 1934), 124.

the action makes no sense at all, yet ought to. A much quoted sentence is a good example of this -- "Lord Ronald said nothing; he flung himself from the room, flung himself upon his horse and rode madly off in all directions."[12] This technique is similar to Mark Twain's.

In creating humour, Dickens depended mainly on character and the incongruity of character. He got his inspiration for the characters chiefly from real persons -- his father became Mr. Micawber, his mother Mrs. Nickleby. Mark Twain, on the other hand, depended for his characters on abstractions and therefore they are comic stereotypes. Leacock's characters and their antics are taken from real life but are composites of many people, seen with a more kindly spirit than that of Dickens.

Dickens's early writing started on a basis of misadventure and the fun of discomfiture which was the stock and trade of comic writers of the day. But the humour soon rose above that to the humour of character. Dickens's characters are portrayed realistically -- every word a character is made to say is exactly what he would have said in real life. This knowledge of le mot juste is fundamental to the art of the humorist.

Mark Twain's humour also began with a basis of discomfiture, but it became a more subtle art because of his individual vision, his affectation of looking at everything with the "eye of innocence." In this way he managed to contrast the old civilization with the new, and yet to some extent, interpret both. His humour lay in his point of

---

[12] Nonsense Novels, p. 73.

view by looking at things crookedly, he gets them straight:

> A deliberate humorist, seeking his effect, is as tiresome as a conscientious clown working by the week. His humour lay in his point of view, his angle of vision and the truth with which he conveyed it. This often enabled people quite suddenly to see things as they are, and not as they had supposed them to be — a process which creates the peculiar sense of personal triumph which we call humour .... Mark Twain achieved this effect not by trying to be funny, but by trying to tell the truth.[13]

Mark Twain always tried to reduce everything to a plain elementary form and to judge it so. He had a sharpness of mind and eye unspoiled and intensified by an isolated youth. He was fond of picking up facts, figures and statistics, and using them in a naive but startling way. Leacock sometimes also tried to adopt the eye of innocence but not always with the success of Mark Twain. With his educational and professional background, Leacock was too conscious of social forces, of the lights and shades of history to ignore their implications, although in his earliest work he was successful with this technique.

On the other hand, Leacock was adept at imitating Dickens' style and did so on several occasions. In some of his sketches, the style is so close to that of Dickens that the reader is apt to forget that it is only Leacock's reconstruction of the style. Vivid and sensuous description is one of the notable features of Dickens' style because it appeals at once to the taste, the eye and the ear. But, on the whole, both Mark Twain and Leacock concentrate on appealing to the sense of hearing rather than to any of the other senses.

---

[13] Stephen Leacock, Mark Twain (New York, 1933), p. 3.

For Leacock the nineteenth century was the era of the printed word. With the appearance of diffused printing and widespread education, the public indulged in the long novels which were put at its disposal. According to Leacock, Mark Twain and Charles Dickens represent the highest reach of nineteenth-century humour. Both achieved the plane of humour where the incongruities of life itself are voiced, where tears and laughter are joined, and men can band together to laugh and not weep at their common misgivings.

But both writers have their faults, as Leacock points out. The humour of Dickens is often disfigured by sentimentality, a failing of the age which loved tears and revelled in the luxury of sorrow. "To this Dickens easily succumbs; tears become maudelin, pathos passes into hiccoughs, and noble indignation snorts off into bombast and rodomontade."[15] Mark Twain did not suffer from sentimentality; his failing was prolixity, for "the license that comes with phenomenal and sustained success opens the way to prolixity. The minute a man is convinced that he is interesting, he isn't."[16] As he grew older, Mark Twain was reckless in his egotistical demand on the reader's time and attention. Leacock says wisely that Mark Twain should have been content to remain Mark Twain, if he could face the ignominy of being a "funny" writer and live it down.[17]

---

[15] Stephen Leacock, "Two Humorists: Charles Dickens and Mark Twain," Yale Review, XXIV (September, 1934), 127.

[16] Humor: Its Theory and Technique, p. 96.

[17] Mark Twain, p. 128.

At their best, Leacock has the greatest admiration and praise for these two writers. Of Dickens's entire output, he ranked the Pickwick Papers as the finest and next to it, David Copperfield in which Dickens introduces one of the most important characters halfway through the book and still makes her credible. Where Dickens excels over other writers, says Leacock, is in his ability to see good in everything:

> When he presents a crook like Alfred Jingle, and makes him almost loveable .... This "divine retrospect" was the real marvel of Dickens's genius .... This soft light of retrospect that looks back on the sins and sorrows of life, as we do on the angers of childhood, with the same understanding and forgiveness, this is humor at its greatest.[18]

Mark Twain's Huckleberry Finn, according to Leacock, is not only a humorous book but the first book ever written in America that could be called American literature and the greatest book ever written in America:

> By American literature in the proper sense we ought to mean literature written in an American way, with an American turn of language and an American cast of thought. The test is that it couldn't have been written anywhere else .... Judged in this sense -- and in order to make the point clear and rob it of all venom -- there is yet no Canadian literature, though many books have been written in Canada, including some very bad ones.
>
> But Huckleberry Finn was triumphantly obvious and undeniably American.[19]

Both Charles Dickens and Mark Twain used humour as a social corrective. Mark Twain tried to uplift the world but when he did so, his mechanism and technique as a humorist were indifferent. He knew nothing of relativity or of the lights and shadows of history, and he never argued long for the same cause. The mental fatigue of being a

---

[18] Humor: Its Theory and Technique, p. 125.

[19] Mark Twain, pp. 87-88.

champion was contrary to the spirit of Mark Twain's genius. He never cried over the poor, as Dickens did, because the West had made him tough. He denounced injustice and political wrong, but he did so in flaring invective, in raw coarse language, not in sobs. And yet there are in his books none of the fierce diatribes Charles Dickens uses. The reason for this, Leacock tells the reader, is that Mark Twain's wife edited his writings and made him delete anything that could be construed as not being respectable:

> He wanted to write of things which his loving 'censors' told him he mustn't talk about; and he wanted to use words and phrases which his loving censors told him 'nice' people didn't use. And his faith in their views was as naive and as touching as the respect of Nigger Jim for white people.[20]

The social purpose of Charles Dickens, particularly the insistence on charity, honesty and integrity, was more sustained than that of Mark Twain. During his forties the uproarious fun of his earlier writings was beginning to fade out of his work, and Leacock tells the reader that at mid-career Dickens seemed to be attracted by the idea of moulding public opinion, or rather of dictating it, since moulding is but a slow process. The notion of being an arbiter of merit, a court of resort to award the palm of virtue and to assign to evil its appropriate condemnation, appealed at once to his genius and to his peculiar conceit.[21] Unlike Mark Twain, Dickens never felt the fetters of respectability:

---

20 Mark Twain, p. 64.

21 Charles Dickens, His Life and Work, p. 103.

He himself was utterly and absolutely respectable and orthodox. He turned his Christianity round to get the bright side out, and he turned sinfulness the other way to make it look black. We English are still all like that. We try to be tough in our literature, but we can't -- only in our conduct.[22]

Leacock's social criticism is less severe than Dickens' but sounder than Mark Twain's. Like Mark Twain, Leacock's reputation was based on his funny writings in his own day. Today, Leacock's more serious works are beginning to be evaluated. He said of Mark Twain:

Mark Twain only half-expressed himself. Of the things nearest to his mind he spoke but low or spoke not at all .... Instinct told him that had he done so, the Mark Twain legend that had filled the world would pass away. The kindly humorist, with a corn-cob pipe would also be a rebel, an atheist, an anti-clerical.[23]

If Leacock felt any reservations about subject matter, it was because he knew that the subject was not within the territory of humorous creation. Mark Twain didn't write about certain subjects only because he was told not to, but Leacock did not write about those subjects in which he had implicit belief -- the Anglican Church, the Conservative Party, and the preservation of the British Commonwealth-- because he knew they had no place in humour. In his social criticism he dealt with the surface humbug of these subjects and many others, and as Desmond Pacey has pointed out, as a social critic, Leacock was in the tradition of both Dickens and Mark Twain:

---

22 Charles Dickens, His Life and Work, p. 159.

23 Mark Twain, p. 5.

His literary purpose was similar to that of Addison, attempting to persuade the new middle class to take something of the culture and humanity of the landed gentry; similar to that of Dickens calling amid a squalid industrialism for the colour and kindness of a slower age; similar finally to that of Mark Twain, yearning amid the tinsel of the Gilded Age for the simple virtues of pioneer America .... Like him, they were all laughing philosophers, but in them all, as in him, there was a serious underlying purpose.[24]

Unlike Charles Dickens and Mark Twain, who depended for their living on their writings, Stephen Leacock was first of all a gifted educator. He says, "By a strange confusion of thought a professor is presumed to be a good man .... It is gratuitously presumed that such men prefer tea to whiskey-and-soda, blindman's buff to draw poker, and a freshmen's picnic to a prize fight."[25] But this was not Stephen Leacock.

II

His usual day started at five in the morning when he would get up, brew himself a pot of tea and with some bread at his elbow, he would sit down at his desk -- either at his home on Côte des Neiges Road in Montreal or in the large room built over the boathouse at Old Brewery Bay in Orillia -- and begin to write. He claimed that it was at this time of day that he did his best work. He always wrote in a broad-sweeping hand and had no use for typewriters, either mechanical or feminine. At seven o'clock he would take a walk on Pine Avenue and was almost certain to meet some student who had gotten up especially early to walk along with him in order to discuss some problem in economics. Returning home, Leacock

---

24 Desmond Pacey, "Leacock as a Satirist," Queens Quarterly, LVIII (Summer, 1951), 218.

25 Essays and Literary Studies, p. 29.

would have breakfast and then go back to his writing until eleven or eleven-thirty when it was time to leave for the University.

Three days a week he lectured at McGill from 12 to 1 and from 2 to 4 o'clock, after which he descended to the University Club, of which he was one of the founders, to put in a few games of billiards before dinner. Sometimes he just sat in his favourite chair in the lounge talking with whomever he met there:

> He chose that exact spot because, as he was fond of explaining, he could prove that it was located in the dead centre of the Indian village of Hochelaga. Hochelaga was bounded roughly by Sherbrooke Street on the north, Burnside on the south and ran from about Peel Street on the west to approximately University Street on the east.
>
> Leacock was at his happiest when he was perched right in the middle of it.[26]

He was usually joined at the Club by his good friend, René du Roure, Head of the French Department at McGill who died shortly after the collapse of France in the Second World War. Leacock and René du Roure were the closest of friends for many years and spent many evenings in Leacock's study discussing history, literature or education, or playing chess either with a board and men or without one, relying entirely on their phenomenal memories.

Leacock liked to go to bed early, sleeping for a while and then reappearing downstairs a few hours later to see if there was anyone there with whom he could talk. If there wasn't, he would take some cheese and crackers from the sideboard and go back to bed.

---

[26] Victor C. Wansbrough, "Stephen Leacock," McGill News, XXXVII (Winter, 1955), 53.

On many evenings friends were invited to drop in and visit, and at such times the talk and the drinks lasted until the early hours of the morning. Leacock was well known among his friends for his cocktails of cuban rum and cream. Any occasion was an excuse for a party and like Dickens, Leacock loved to entertain. If he were having guests in for dinner, he took special delight in planning the meal himself, preferring a french type of dinner with many courses. Sometimes he made little menus by longhand for each of the guests so that they would know what they were going to get to eat. Later the boys would settle down for an evening of fun and talk. Of these evenings his good friend and colleague, John Culliton, remembers:

> He was a grand guest and a grander host, and he loved an evening with the "boys", most of whom were over fifty. His generosity, his kindliness, and his humour made those evenings unforgettable.
>
> He was a born raconteur; his face would light up; his eyes shine, and that infectious chuckle bubbling up from inside would overflow to all around him. "Enjoy this with me," it seemed to say.[27]

Sometimes "this" happened to be an anecdote based on some incident which occurred that day or which he had dug up especially for the occasion from his stock of memories. But more likely, it was his latest article or a sketch from the book he was writing at the moment. He loved to read aloud in his full-toned voice, pausing for emphasis, enjoying the laughter that followed and often chuckling merrily himself, exulting in a thing well done.

---

[27] John Culliton, p. 24.

And his friends stood him in good stead when he was asked to do a series of radio broadcasts. He did not like the idea of talking into a microphone because he wanted and needed to feel the pulse of the audience. He would, therefore, ask a dozen or more people to join him for drinks at the University Club and then take them in a body over to the broadcasting studio. When the talk was finished, the party piled into the waiting taxis and returned to the Leacock home where supper and the fun of the evening were waiting. One of these broadcasts is still extant and in the possession of the McGill Graduate Society. It is a reading of "My Old College," a pamphlet which he wrote for the Graduate Society and the recording shows the kindliness of his voice, the way in which he often interrupted himself to enjoy some well-turned phrase or humorous thought, and most of all, his love of reading aloud. One year he had a contract for a national network radio series and when summer came, microphone, equipment, technicians and announcers made the weekly trip to Old Brewery Bay and the broadcasts originated from the living room:

> Whatever may have been the opinion of those responsible for the technical handling of the programme, those who participated in the warm glow of the personality of the show felt ever after that something had gone out of radio when the series ended.[28]

But McGill was the centre around which all his other activities revolved. He liked to remark that "it was on a January afternoon in the

---

[28] Reported in The Montrealer, XXIX (October, 1955), 13.

last year of the reign of Queen Victoria, that I took off my college cap in room number five of the Arts Building and delivered a lecture on the government of England. The good old Queen, I remember, was reported ill immediately after the lecture."[29] From the time that he came there in 1901, McGill was always home. He once wrote to a friend, "You know as I do that if a person is to write as a life profession there is nothing like a fixed definite connection to bring out whatever talent he has."[30]

He lectured at McGill three days a week and this left him ample time for outside lectures and literary work. His niece, Barbara Nimmo, who acted as his secretary for some time, said:

> McGill was one of the great interests in his life, and he was one of its outstanding figures. One always knew when he came into the Arts Building by his sure heavy step and the loud thump of his cane on the marble floor, even if he didn't chance to greet anyone in his deep resonant voice .... He would rather have been a professor than anything else, and especially at McGill. He thought it a position of great dignity, not of humility. He liked McGill as a cosmopolitan seat of knowledge, not bound by religious sects or narrow policies.[31]

His notion on how to teach was to refrain from wrath and to apply humour and his classes were punctured with gales of laughter. He lectured from a set of moth-eaten notes to which he rarely paid attention, relying on his vast knowledge and remarkable memory. When he lectured, he talked about everything under the sun, revealing the glittering facets of a mind which never forgot anything it read and opening up vista after

---

29 Stephen Leacock, "The Flight of College Time," McGill Fortnightly Review, I (November 21, 1925), 3.

30 Stephen Leacock, "Letter to Napier Moore," dated Dec. 25, 1943. Collection of the Orillia Public Library, Orillia Ontario.

31 Barbara Nimmo, p. 8.

vista while one thing led to another. One writer has remarked that "he occasionally pauses part way through a lecture to remind the students that he has now given them all their fees entitle them to and is delivering the remainder from the goodness of his heart."[32]

In the preparation for examinations, students knew him as a stern task-master devoid of comedy in his efforts to bring them to grips with the harsh facts of economic life. He valued very highly his own textbook, Elements of Political Science, a much out-dated book. But in the lecture room he sought to expound the broad truth of the subject. He was a common sense economist but certainly not an orthodox one. His approach, as to everything else, was historical and sprinkled with humour. He was impatient with hair-splitting scholarship and pretentious economic theorists. He believed that the end of a college education was to get students to think for themselves.

He was a gifted educator who exerted a powerful and beneficial influence on his alert students and they learned more from him than mere economics. Their attention rarely strayed when he was lecturing except when he was discussing the wanderings of economic thinkers and then he droned, almost inaudibly, through his lecture. To his honour students and to young persons of intellectual ability, he was generous with his time and advice, treating them as wards and friends and not merely as pupils. He sometimes helped them to get started in the business world

---

32 "R.T.L." (Charles Vining), Bigwigs (Toronto, 1935), p. 93.

through personal introductions or to gain higher degrees at outside colleges. A former student remembers him as a brown, shaggy man with a brown, shaggy dog which Bill Gentleman, the janitor, refused to allow in the Arts Building and which Leacock would allow only an honours student to hold outside while he attended to his business.[33]

His associates in the Department of Economics also enjoyed working with him:

> We prided ourselves -- and the credit was his -- that we were the happiest and most harmonious Department in the University. Departmental meetings, which can be too often boring and sometimes acrimonious, were under his auspices riotous fun and better entertainment than could be found by any costly search; but the work got done.[34]

Leacock liked to stir up healthy controversy on the campus and was always ready to give his support to a new literary magazine. Early in 1932 he even proposed that the McGill Daily, the college newspaper, turn its Friday issues into a literary paper. This plan was impractical because of financial considerations but Leacock kept sending in suggestions to the editor until the editor was forced to take a firm stand and declare the matter closed.[35] One time he even involved the whole Mathematics Department in an abstruse problem until it was discovered that the problem related the cubic space of his cellar to beer.

---

33 Phyllis Lee Peterson, "My Heart Belongs to Old McGill," Macleans, LXIX (January 21, 1956), 30.

34 J.P. Day, "Professor Leacock at McGill," CJE, X (May, 1944), 227-228.

35 See Stephen Leacock, "Novel Idea Proposed: An Ambitious Plan for The Daily," The McGill Daily, XXI (January 22 to January 28, 1932).

He put great demands on the library to order books which he felt were vital for his students. He sent in long lists of books because he believed that one of the prime requisites of a good university was an adequately stocked library. Criticized for his too frequent orders for books, he replied:

> Yours 19th. I propose to go on sending in lists of books that ought to be ordered. If the college can't buy them that's too bad. But the list is necessary anyway.
> Please buy in arrears. Wait till money comes in and then spend it.[36]

In the spring of 1936 Stephen Leacock was retired because he had reached the age limit at McGill. His retirement came as a shock to him because of his immense amount of physical energy and zest. McGill was home to him and he was hurt that he was being turned out. He refused to be shelved although he referred to himself as one of the condemned members of the Senility Gang. He had never really thought of retirement, since McGill had always furnished the focal point of all his activities. Most of all he hated to be called "an old man." On more than one occasion he said:

> The man says "when I retire" -- and then when retirement comes he looks back over the path traversed, a cold wind sweeps over the fading landscape and he feels somehow that he has missed it all. For the reality of life, we learn too late, is in the living tissue of it from day to day, not in the expectation of better, nor in the fear of worse....
> If one could only live each moment to the full, in a present, intense with its own absorption, even if as transitory and evanescent as Einstein's "here" and "now."[37]

---

[36] Stephen Leacock, "Letter to G. Lomer," dated January 13, 1930. Collection of McGill University Library.

[37] My Remarkable Uncle, p. 297. See also Too Much College, p. 19.

In the spring of 1936 thirteen members of the staff of McGill and its affiliate, Macdonald College, were retired because of a decision by the Board of Governors on December 18, 1935 to enforce a clause in the statutes which said that McGill authorities have the right to retire any officer of the University after he has attained the age of sixty-five. Six months later, the Board of Governors voted for automatic retirement at sixty-five. Leacock, however, was very annoyed when, on his sixty-fifth birthday, he received an abrupt letter informing him that he would automatically be retired that year. He thought that something a little more considerate than a formal application of the rule would have been proper after his long years of service.

It has already been seen that Leacock was popular among his students and among the members of his department, of which he was then Chairman. It is said that during the thirties many people felt that Leacock's outside activities were taking up too much of his time and that he was not devoting enough time to his professorial duties. His crackling optimism was not appreciated by those around the university who were feeling the pinch of the depression.[38] One of his colleagues, however, said:

> It was inevitable that his reputation as an economist and political scientist should be overshadowed by his literary fame. It is also true that his students could learn much more from him than mere economics. The deduction, however, that his serious regard and enthusiasm for his work at McGill suffered from his many-sided interests is not one which would ever be made by his colleagues or his students. We knew very confidently that his heart was in his work; we felt his genuine interest in our progress, and we could always rely on him for aid and comfort.[39]

---

[38] Stephen Leacock, "Inflation and Deflation," The Dry Pickwick, pp. 251-260 is an example of the kind of sketch that would not be popular during a depression.

[39] J.P. Day, p. 227.

Undergraduates circulated a petition "regretting the retirement of Dr. Leacock," but the Board of Governors held firm. It is even reported that Leacock refused an offer to join the staff of Harvard;[40] but McGill was home to him and would always be. "My permanent address (in this world)," he wrote to a business correspondent, "is McGill University, Montreal, as I was professor there for thirty-six years and am now a Professor Emeritus."[41]

On February 12, 1936 Leacock made what he declared would be his last public appearance in Montreal. He said, "Now that I am put on the shelf, I am going to remain on the shelf. I am going to be as high as a Parsee on a tower. I shall reflect a hell of a lot, but I shall say nothing." He was obviously bitter about his enforced retirement and in an interview with the Montreal Star, he said, "I have plenty to say about the Governors of McGill putting me out of the University. But I have all eternity to say it in. I shall shout it down to them."[42]

Long before he had retired as a lecturer in Political Economy, however, Leacock had ceased to care about the subject. When he had begun his research just before the turn of the century, Political Economy was still a young science and its emphasis was historical. But it rapidly became a study beset with theorists and as early as 1916, Leacock was disillusioned with it:

---

[40] McGill News, XVII (Spring, 1936), 46.

[41] Last Leaves, viii-ix.

[42] McGill News, XVII (Spring, 1936), 46.

When I sit and warm my hands, as best I may, at the little heap of embers that is now Political Economy, I cannot but contrast its dying glow with the generous blaze of the vain-glorious and triumphant science that once it was.[43]

Although he believed that the philosophical and speculative analysis of economic life is the highest study of all, next to the riddle of existence, he felt that when it was broken up into classes and credits, it became a mere mockery far removed from society.[44] In Hellements of Hickonomics he said that the science of economics is now crippled and discredited with controversy. He calls for less pedantic probing and futile searching after knowledge effected by exposing the errors of the past and in its place, he calls for the same vivifying touch of imagination which was needed in other branches of modern education. As for himself, however, he said:

Forty years of hard work on economics has pretty well removed all the ideas I ever had about it. I think the whole science is a wreck and has got to be built up again. For our social problems there is about as much light to be found in the older economics as from a glow-worm.[45]

Thus just as the earlier Classical and Modern Languages had ceased to interest him, Economics was no longer of enough interest to keep him fully occupied. The one thing that did keep his interest throughout his life was Humour, both the writing of it and as an integral philosophy of life and living. He says, "Believe me, ladies and gentlemen,

---

[43] Essays and Literary Studies, p. 28.

[44] Model Memoirs, pp. 173-174. See also Stephen Leacock, "What Is Left of Adam Smith?" CJE, I (February, 1935), 41-51.

[45] Hellements of Hickonomics, vi.

if I were allowed to talk upon humour as a serious matter I would try to show you that perhaps sometimes we can get a clearer view of the world by reading what is called its humour, looking at its comic characters, than by looking at its serious phases."[46]

---

[46] Here Are My Lectures and Stories, p. 6.

C H A P T E R E I G H T:

A DISCUSSION OF LEACOCK'S THEORY OF HUMOUR

"If the study of humor is ever
taken seriously, we must handle it
carefully, lest it work its own undoing."

Humor: Its Theory and Technique,
pp. 106-107.

Leacock had been a practising humorist for a great many years before he wrote his first book-length study of humour as an art form. His two books on the subject, Humor: Its Theory and Technique and Humor and Humanity, appeared in 1935 and 1938, respectively. He later included some of the same material in his book on writing in general, How To Write. It is important to note that Leacock did not work out his theory of humour until he had become a successful practitioner of the art, that he did not have a set of principles which he consciously used when he first started writing humour. The principles which came later and which he used to formulate his theory of humour leave much to be desired, but there is no doubt that he did make some valuable observations about the technique of humour as an art form.

Leacock realized that humour as a term of reference could be used either subjectively or objectively:

> The difficulty [in defining humour] is all the greater because we used the word in two senses, sometimes to mean something in ourselves, our "sense of humour," and at other times to mean the "humour of a situation," as if it were something outside of ourselves.[1]

In his study of humour he concerned himself both with the objective and subjective sense of humour and spent much time showing the various technical devices of humour.

---

[1] Stephen Leacock, How to Write (New York, 1943), p. 213.

Leacock first attempted a definition of humour in Essays and Literary Studies and later he propounded his ideas about humour in almost every book he wrote. Basically his theory -- of which the underlining thesis is that like humanity, humour has grown more kindly through the ages -- never changed to any great degree although it did expand and become more concerned with the connection between humour, kindliness and life. An early article on humour says:

> The basis of the humorous, the amusing, the ludicrous, lies in the incongruity, the unfittingness, the want of harmony among things; and this incongruity, according to the various stages of evolution of human society and of the art of speech, may appear in primitive form, or may assume a more complex manifestation.[2]

In this study we are concerned with two main aspects of his theory: a) the theory of humour as it applied to life and literature through the ages and b) the ideas on how humour should be written -- its technique. With regard to the first point, Leacock maintained that throughout the period known as civilization, humour has been undergoing a refining process in which it has changed from a primitive delight in cruelty to one of sublime pathos and divine retrospect as achieved by the Victorian writers. He regarded humour as the natural expression of man which developed along with the emotions and with speech but which originated even before speech itself.

Primitive humour, the archeocomical or paleoridiculous, had its basis in injury or destruction. It manifested itself as a

---

[2]Stephen Leacock, "American Humor," Living Age, CCLXXXIII (October 10, 1914), 94.

triumphant shout and was both cruel and antisocial, revelling in the triumph of one person over some other person or thing. This kind of humour, he says, is repeated in the actions of young children and also in their enjoyment of such tales as "Jack, the Giant Killer". But for humanity in general it is no longer funny to see a man hurt himself, although the mere appearance of injury is still fun. Classical writings, he says, reflect primitive humour. Aristotle's definition of humour indicates the light in which the writers of antiquity regarded humour as an art form:

> As for Comedy, it is (as has been observed) an imitation of men worse than the average; worse, however, not as regards any and every sort of fault but only as regards one particular kind, the Ridiculous, which is a species of the Ugly. The Ridiculous may be defined as a mistake or deformity not productive of pain or harm to others; the mask, for instance, that excites laughter, is something ugly and distorted without causing pain.[3]

It is Leacock's contention that classical writers cannot be humorous to us because of this primitivistic approach to the art form. But more important is the fact that their works are so distant in time and space that they need too much explanation to receive an immediate reaction. As Leacock says, humour cannot survive when it has to be translated from one language to another or from one age to another.

At the next stage humour is lifted from real cruelty and becomes only the mere appearance of physical injury. In this form, humour

---

[3]Aristotle, "The Poetics," tr. Ingram Bywater, Introduction to Aristotle, ed. Richard McKeon (New York, 1947), p. 630.

is still based on the destructive element but it takes the form of horse-play, mockery, pantomime or farce. This type of humour turns on the contrast between the "thing as it is, or ought to be, and the thing smashed out of shape and as it ought not to be".[4] This stage of humour is characterized by incongruity or maladjustment and is expressed best by the life and literature of the Middle Ages as well as by the practical jokes of schoolboys. Here laughter is more retributive than humorous, says Leacock.

Up to this point Leacock's theory of humour has been concerned with laughter and direct human action rather than with written communication. Whereas it was previously concerned with laughter as a physiological phenomenon, it now deals with literary humour. Leacock makes a clear distinction between laughter and humour, two terms which are often used interchangeably but which really are different in significance:

> In reality it [laughter] is only an accidental and physical concomitant. Laughter is the mere beginning of humor, both in time and in significance. The end, the final reach [of humor], is nearer to tears.[5]

The theory of laughter is not fully expanded by Leacock because it is only the mere beginning of humour but it has been the subject of careful consideration by modern psychologists and philosophers.

With the rise of literature, the written and spoken word became the prevalent method of communication and humour in the next stage

---

[4]Stephen Leacock, Humor: Its Theory and Technique (Toronto, 1935), p. 11.

[5]Humor: Its Theory and Technique, p. 7.

is no longer antagonistic but contributive towards social feeling. While still relatively primitive as an art form, the written word, according to Leacock, helped to make humour an art form by utilizing inconsistencies and oddities of speech, and by pointing up the contrast between the apparent and real significance of sounds. Wit, the general name given for humour turning on or accompanied by verbal effects, became a popular form of humour employed by Elizabethan and seventeenth-century writers. However Leacock considers the only humorous creations of this period to be Shakespeare's Falstaff and the plays of Moliere.

The greatest advance towards a permanent kind of literary humour was made in the eighteenth century when humour became not merely the incongruity of words and sounds but the contrast of light and shades of human character. With Dickens, Twain and Daudet in the nineteenth century humour reached sublime expression — "where tears and laughter are joined, and our little life, incongruous and vain, is rounded with a smile."[6] Here amusement no longer arises from a single funny idea, meaningless contrast or odd play of words but rests upon the prolonged, sustained incongruities of character and life itself. In this type of humour, Leacock felt that the Victorians excelled over all its predecessors and followers.

In his discussion of twentieth century humour, Leacock is a little bitter. He feels that humour today is moving sideways instead

---

[6]Stephen Leacock, Humor and Humanity (New York, 1938), p. 21.

of upwards. He says that American humour today is topical and ephemeral. It is written for the moment and with the moment it passes. Its essence lies in its brevity; it must be as short as possible. Although he praises political cartoonists and American humorists like Cobb and Benchley, he felt that the motion picture industry, syndicates and radio are responsible for the path which humour is now travelling:

> The expression of all art, and of none more than that of humour, is being revolutionized under our eyes by the new mechanism of the communication of thought, found on the screen and the radio. Here is a new world of mechanical voices and illusive visions, of inconceivable rapidity, things made, executed and forgotten in a fraction of a second. Here appreciation turns into a spasm, ecstasy to a twinge and humour to a bark. From the 'bark' of a moving-picture audience one can perhaps forecast the outline of the 'humour' that is to come — short and snappy, sarcastic — a bark, a snarl — reverting towards the primitive mockery that was cast out long ago.[7]

In his later years, Leacock believed emphatically that there is no humour in the realities of emergency, danger and death. Yet in time of severe trial or war, humour is the last refuge of sorrow and oppression. He says that humour is the saving grace of humanity because it helps "to supply for us, in its degree, such reconciliation as we can find for the mystery, the sorrows, the shortcomings of the world we live in, or, say, of life itself."[8] In Leacock's opinion true humour can stem only from the incongruity of human wrong but never from the deep notes of tragedy or of tyranny,

---

[7] The Greatest Pages of American Humour, p. 231.

[8] My Remarkable Uncle, p. 146.

and "the true humorist must be an optimist. He must present the vision of a better world, if only of a lost one. There is no room for a snarl."[9] In his later life, then, his theory of humour becomes for him a philosophy of life as well. He says, "In the world of today humour lives only with human kindliness and human freedom."[10]

But Leacock's contribution to the study of literary humour lies in his exposition of the technique of humour. There are many effects of humour, some of which are only peculiar to certain writers, and yet he says it never occurs to most people that written fun has a technique:

> There are no books on how to get funny, and no lectures on how to tell funny stories. Yet there ought to be. An earnest young divinity student will try to improve his voice, his rhetoric, his manner; it will never occur to him to work hard to improve his sense of fun .... We study diligently in college the fashion and metre of poetry, or the structure of the paragraph, but seldom seek to analyze the form and mechanism of humorous writing.[11]

Leacock discusses the technique of humour under the following headings: words, ideas, situation, character, and life. In all these headings, there is the emphasis on the thing smashed out of shape and the development of more kindliness with each more intricate form. The least satisfactory part of his theory deals with Comic Verse which he says is written with the intention of being funny and making the reader

---

[9] The Greatest Pages of American Humour, p. 174.

[10] My Remarkable Uncle, p. 170.

[11] Stephen Leacock, "Two Humorists: Charles Dickens and Mark Twain," Yale Review, XXIV (September, 1934), 118.

laugh with the author; and Super Comic verse, which he calls the product of "inspired idiocy". The reason why this section of his theory is unappealing is because he himself thought that poetry is the noblest instrument of human expression but that it ranks subordinate to prose in the world of humour. Of nonsense writing, a form he seldom used, he says. nothing since it is more conducive to poetry than to prose.

The first catagory which Leacock discusses is that of verbal humour in which the humour lies "in the oddity of the sound and sense, the incongruity of the verbal forms thus created, as differing from the 'correct' forms."[12] One of the prime requisites of a humorist, Leacock knew, was an exact knowledge of the value of words, of le mot propre and of the value of using the wrong word in the right place. In addition, the humorist must have the knack of making the language as natural as possible, in order to increase the shock value when the incongruity is spotted. But one of the most important things which the humorist must understand, says Leacock, is the importance of comparison as a technical device:

> Comparison is the very soul of humour. It adjusts the focus of vision of a thing in the light needed. It is the discovery of resemblance and of the lack of it that builds up the contrasts, discrepancies and incongruities on which...humor depends.[13]

---

[12] How to Write, p. 216.

[13] Humor and Humanity, pp. 192-193.

Words, then, can be used for humorous purposes in one of three ways — at face value, at a form converse to face value, or overtime. The Face Value Technique is the contrast between the face value of the words used and the logical significance, for example twisting the meaning of a rhetorical question. The Converse to Face Value Technique which is Leacock's favorite effect is produced "when words and phrases are rushed forward into a significance which they wont bear on closer inspection; in fact the significance involves a complete impossibility yet the sense emerges with a queer incongruity between the fact that it does make sense and the equally true fact that it ought not to."[14] A much quoted sentence is a good example of this: "Lord Ronald said nothing; he flung himself from the room, flung himself upon his horse and rode madly off in all directions."[15] The third technique of verbal humour is that which makes words work overtime and forces them into a meaning which is never given to them, but which on examination seems to be perfectly logical as a meaning they ought to bear. For example of this effect, you might say "running out of stomach", or "The lady bought Golden Dreams, received it wrapped up in green enamelled paper, and passed out."[16] The technique can best be put across by an innocence of artistic eye, which is one of the special features of nineteenth century American humour.

---

[14] Humor: Its Theory and Technique, p. 35.

[15] Nonsense Novels, p. 75.

[16] Moonbeams From A Larger Lunacy, p. 46.

Of the more intricate devices of verbal humour, the pun stands supreme according to Leacock because even when it is senseless, its ingenuity still pleases. In punning "one and the same sound makes two different things and words bring into connection two things that really have nothing to do with one another."[17] Of the various kinds of puns Leacock lists those in which the incongruity lies in the words themselves and not in the thought behind them, those which depend for effect on their being impromptu and actual, and lastly those which carry a secondary application. He considers the latter the highest kind of pun and cites Hood as the Master punster.

Another device of verbal humour is incorrect spelling which came into existence in the late eighteenth century after the English language had been standardized. Leacock attributes the delight that mid-nineteenth century America took in punning from the fact that they took pride in reading and writing and "bad spelling had in it something of the fun of irreverence without the evil conscience."[18] Artemus Ward, in particular, used this humorous device in his writings.

Other trickeries of verbal humour which Leacock discusses include the tone and the rhythm of words. For example certain names have instinctive subconscious sound appeal and associations which can be used profitably by humorists. Dickens was very fond of such names,

---

[17] Humor: Its Theory and Technique, p. 17.

[18] Humor: Its Theory and Technique, p. 24.

as was Leacock himself. Another tonal device mentioned is the combination of two words into one, the telescoped words which Lewis Carroll made famous. Tone, says Leacock, is very important in humorous writing. In connection with rhythm, or the combination of words producing a special appeal by adding sound to sense and also the use of repetitious or alliterative words he does not discuss fully because he feels that they are used more often for beauty and harmony than for humour and incongruity.[19]

Disconnected metaphors, such as throwing one room into another, and wit, the unexpected play on words, also fall under the heading of verbal humour as was mentioned earlier. He says that wit does not deserve a separate term of reference because it is not very broad and is chilling in its effect. For these reasons he places wit under the more inclusive heading of humour.

Two ways in which verbal humour can be expressed are meiosis and hyperbole. Hyperbole, or exaggeration, is a mode of conscious humour common in American writings. Leacock feels that in itself hyperbole is poor stuff as humour and needs a subtle element in combination with it. Meiosis or sustained understatement is more common in British writing because the English abhor sentimentality and the parading of emotions:

---

19 Humor and Humanity, p. 25.

> The American funny story is imaginary. It never happened. Somebody presumably once made it up. It is fiction. Thus there must once have been some great palpitating brain, some glowing imagination, which invented the story of the man who was put off at Buffalo. But the English "screamingly funny" story is not imaginary. It really did happen. It is an actual personal experience. In short, it is not fiction, but history. [20]

The next general heading which Leacock discusses is that of humour of ideas under which he classes the Joke, the Funny Story, and also the devices of getting fun out of something already written.

The Joke, which is humour reduced to a single point, does not need further explanation. On the other hand, the Funny Story needs the art of narration and the power of expression in addition to the initial funny idea to put it across. Leacock divides funny stories into two catagories: the simple and the complex. The simple funny story is one which either has a 'tag' at the end or which narrates a short sequence with a turn on some well-known phrase. The more complex funny story is one in which all is in fun, but which has a 'nub' at the end as well. But the most interesting funny story is that which is interesting all the way through and which depends not on the 'nub' but on something in the setting and circumstance of the story. It is this brand of funny idea which Leacock practised in most of his writing.

Since the art of narration is important in the telling of the funny story, Leacock shows how a good story can be spoiled. He mentions the Crab Fashion Story in which the narration moves backwards

---

[20] Stephen Leacock, "Stories and Story-Tellers," The Outlook, CXXX (February, 1922), 184.

and thus never reaches the point; the story with too many narrators or characters in it; the story in which the point is mishandled and there is a series of running commentaries; the pointless story in which the punch line is forgotten; and, the story with needless introduction and in which the narrator foolishly asks if the listener has heard the story before.[21] He emphasizes the need for native ability and disciplines training in order to put across the funny story:

> A humorous idea that becomes the basis of a talk or story, most usually starts with some small casual incongruity of fact or language that crops up in ordinary life. A mind of a certain native angle of vision will see it where others don't, just as a hunter sees half-hidden game that others would pass unnoticed. A mind trained by practice to expression finds means to turn such small incongruity into something broad and visible, dragging after it perhaps a sequence.[22]

Each nation, he says, has its own ideas about telling a funny story, and certain distinguishing features by which it is known. There is, for example, the British Story with its fidelity to fact, the Irish Bull, Scottish Grim Humour and The American Story which specializes in tall tales and gargantuan exaggerations. The virtue of this last type of story lies not in the point or nub at the end but in the decorative detail and the manner with which it is told. Generally, it is told with the eye of innocence:

> The humor that we call American is based on seeing things as they are, as apart from history, convention and prestige, and thus introducing sudden and startling contrasts as between things as they are supposed to be -- revered institutions, accepted traditions, established conventions -- and things as they are. Like many other things this humor came out of the West, beyond the plains. You had to get clear away from civilization to start it.[23]

---

[21] Humor: Its Theory and Technique, pp. 198-219.

[22] How to Write, p. 13.

[23] Humor and Humanity, p. 218.

During the same period that his two books on humour appeared, Leacock also selected and discussed The Greatest Pages of American Humour (London, 1937). In this book he says that of all national humours, the American has a prestige not usually associated with the term humour. In general the book is a study of the rise and development of humour in America. His approach is historical and is slanted towards the general reader, with selections from some of the more famous American humorists. It has a few interesting remarks about twentieth century American humour.

In his books on humour Leacock devotes considerable space to humorous ideas derived from other people's work, namely parodies, burlesques and mistranslations. The simplest form of parody is Transcription of Names often practised by schoolboys who want to ridicule their texts. The Literary Parody, a more artistic form of humorous idea, depends for its humour on the juxtaposition through similarity of form between the lofty theme of the original and the commonplace or trivial theme of the parody. In addition it can go farther and both reproduce and exaggerate not only the weaknesses of the theme but also of the style, typical plot, and characterization of a particular author. In this way the literary parody becomes a corrective against oversentiment and is often more effective and more rapid than direct criticism:

> The parody is a protest against the over-sentimentality, or the over-reputation of the original. The parody is the discord that follows and corrects a note too often struck.[24]

---

[24] Humor and Humanity, p. 58.

A secondary function of the humorous parody, says Leacock, is to make us smile, while reflecting the difference or lapse of time between the original and the parody and to offer us relief from pain and consolation against the shortcomings of life.

Verbal parodies are mostly poetic, he says in Humor: Its Theory and Technique, but in his later book he also mentions parodies of history and literary criticism. The highest reach attainable in this kind of writing is the parody of history which is used to suggest hidden truths. He cites 1066 and All That as a good example of the historical parody. He also mentions Robert Benchley as an ingenious parodist of pedantic Shakespearean criticism.

The dividing line between parody and burlesque is finely drawn but he suggests that when a parody is extended from one story or author to a type of story or genre, it becomes a burlesque. Unlike parodies, burlesques are usually in prose. Leacock defines burlesques as follows:

> To 'burlesque' anything means to make fun out of it, not of it; a burlesque version of a play merely means the treatment of the same theme in a comic way, not anything derogatory to the theme itself.[25]

Burlesque, then, is the treatment of a trivial subject in an elevated manner or the treatment of an elevated subject in a trivial way. Unlike the parody it is usually painless because the author plays the fool while giving the impression of high art. Burlesque can operate in one of two ways — placing the standards either above or below the actual

---

[25] Humor and Humanity, p. 53.

level which the subject deserves. But in both instances the author depends on the reader having the necessary information to see the implied criticism. When the knowledge that supports it is forgotten, the burlesque withers. It is a credit to Leacock that his burlesques of contemporary fiction can still be enjoyed today without a knowledge of the original.

Humour of situation depends on a set of circumstances which involve discomfiture, but not pain. It is primarily based on a sudden juxtaposition of incongruities which does not depend for its effect on any particular form of words, people, or character. Character when it is found in humour of situation only enters in as a secondary degree. Leacock defines humour of situation as arising out of:

> any set of circumstances that involve discomfiture or disaster of some odd incongruous kind, not connected with the ordinary run of things and not involving sufficient pain or disaster to over-weigh the pleasures of contemplating this incongruous distress: or it may arise without any great amount of personal discomfiture when the circumstances themselves are so incongruous as to involve a sort of paradox.[26]

Humour of situation, according to Leacock's theory, is the end result of the medieval love of horseplay and of "comic relief" which is a protection afforded by laughter against tears, by amusement against horror. This comic relief is something, he says, of which the Greeks knew nothing. It is a more recent development which was mastered by the

---

[26] Humor and Humanity, p. 79.

Victorians but which in our own time had become a convention, rigid as a frame. The prime example of humour of discomfiture in a situation is found at the beginning of the Pickwick Papers, before we are aware of the character of Mr. Pickwick himself, and delight in the situations in which he and his companions find themselves.

In his discussion of humorous characters, Leacock makes the initial distinction between outstanding characters, or humour of character, and humorous characters. By outstanding characters he means individuals in whom some particular quality or eminence is developed beyond those of his fellow men. By humorous characters is meant "difference and oddities in character of a nature to involve an incongruity, contradiction or paradox, and thus set up that 'frustrated expectation' which we have seen to be the basis of all humour".[27]

With regard to outstanding characters, he says that vagaries and oddities of dress, gait, manner and accent can be standardized as 'funny' and thus retain their first shock and contrast value. But modern life, with its levelling tendencies, can eliminate if not outstanding characters then at least the appearance of it. To this extent only, there were more 'characters' in our youth than there are now and those that are left are harder to find.

A definition of humorous characters given elsewhere seems to include both the humorous character in real life and that found in fiction:

---

[27] Humor and Humanity, p. 100.

> A humorous character must be a person whose essential nature is pleasant to contemplate, with a minimum of malice, so small and ineffective as to be harmless, a minimum of hate, or else a hate so gigantic and so futile as to be laughable. Such a character must, by his own outlook, live in a kindly world. To this may be added some little touches of absent-mindedness, and an odd incapacity for simple things. Such characters as a rule ripen with age.[28]

Once again there is the emphasis on the need for kindliness and humour to be combined with each other. In the above passage he says that the humorous character "must, by his own outlook, live in a kindly world" yet it can be noticed from a study of humour that this world in which the character lives may not always seem kindly to the reader.

The humorous character in literature according to Leacock's theory must present incongruities which when analyzed do not seem to clash with reality. Some of the greatest humorous characters in literature include Don Quixote, Falstaff, Monsieur Jourdain, Tartarin, Sam Slick, and above all Sam Weller and Mr. Pickwick:

> Here is Mr. Pickwick -- with all the dignity and decorum of affluent middle age as contrasted with its physical limitations; with a highly scientific desire for information contrasted with an utter inability to measure its truth; with a chivalrous and unwearied courtesy which makes him an easy mark -- expecting truth and finding deception; seeing the world through roseate spectacles which presently turn a bad world rosy. Mr. Pickwick walks through life conveying with him the contrast between life as it might be and life as it is.[29]

Here we see in Mr. Pickwick all the incongruities, the frustrated expectations, and the sudden juxtaposition of impossibility and reality

---

[28] How to Write, p. 254.

[29] Humor: Its Theory and Technique, p. 107.

which make up the truly humorous character. In Leacock's opinion Mr. Pickwick is the greatest humorous creation, even greater than Shakespeare's Falstaff because of the situations in which he is placed and the air he lends to the entire book.

Once the writer has achieved that combination of character and situation mentioned before, only then will he get a truly humorous conception. Another important factor in humorous writing is the creation of atmosphere, of which Dickens is the master. This humorous atmosphere can be created in one of two ways — either by putting the narration into the mouth of one of the characters, or by means of relating in such a manner that is both the author's own voice and at the same time the voice of the world.

But once the writer is aware of all these factors and sits down to write humour, Leacock says:

> Stories, I repeat, that are really worth while, are hard to write. Most people who aspire to be story writers think that stories depend upon incidents, upon a plot. This is not so. They depend on the telling.... the main thing in any story is to be able to <u>think</u> the character into reality, and then find the words to convey what you think. Once you can create a character, as the phrase runs (<u>catch</u> a character would be better), anything and everything about him is a story.[30]

In literature the highest form of artistic humour or sublime humour, is that which alights on some creative structure or glows through the surface. That is to say, humour is greatest when it becomes

---

[30] <u>How to Write</u>, p. 24.

the by-product of the whole creative effort rather than the chief end which the author had in mind. Although Leacock never says this explicitly, it becomes obvious from a study of his theory of sublime humour.

Atmosphere plays an important part in providing sublime humour:

> But the greatest thing about the Pickwick Papers, of which Mr. Pickwick is at once the cause and effect, is the warm glow of humanity — human kindliness that suffuses every page. I defy anybody to produce a summer atmosphere brighter and more attractive than that of the All Muggleton cricket match.[31]

In addition to the Pickwick Papers, Huckleberry Finn held a high place among Leacock's honour list of humorous products. Although Huck himself is not a humorous character, the book is humorous because in it the humour emanates from the dramatic structure and atmosphere in which Huck plays a major role. He is the humorous norm of the book: without him, the book contains only brutality and stark reporting. But Huck can't grow spiritually like Pickwick because he lacks the force of civilization -- the element of pity which is not found when you overthrow civilization. "The basis of the book is the picture of Huck and Jim on the river, and the atmosphere that seems to breathe from its pages the mingled tears and laughter, the smile that is a sigh, which marks the highest form of humor."[32]

---

[31] Humor and Humanity, p. 126.

[32] Humor and Humanity, pp. 224-225.

Leacock says that sublime humour works in two directions. In the first place it works in life as it does in literature where it becomes a by-product of the whole. The greatest humour is born in perplexity and in the contemplation of the insoluble riddle of existence, and it forms an interpretation of life which can only happen when men become too sympathetic to laugh at each other for their individual defects and can join together not to lament but to laugh over their shortcomings. Humour is saved from indifference and cruelty "by having made first acquaintance and then union with pathos, meaning here, pity for human suffering. United, each tempers and supports the other: pathos keeps humor from breaking into gaffaws and humor keeps pathos from subsiding into sobs."[33] Thus in the incongruous contrast between the eager fret of our life and its final nothingness, humor and pathos unite and voice sorrow for our human lot and reconciliation with it.

The second important direction in which sublime humour works is that of Divine Retrospect which views life, even life now, in as soft a light as we view the past.[34] When hate passes out of a thing, the bitterness is also washed out. And, he says, it seems a psychological law that when pain steps out, joy comes in. In this way, the past loses its pain and from this subtle ingredient, sublime humour is created. Leacock believes that this divine retrospect

---

[33] Humor and Humanity, p. 212.

[34] Humor and Humanity, p. 216.

is a gift of the gods which the individual must recognize in himself in order that humour act effectively as an integral part of life and living. For Leacock, then, laughter is the mere beginning of humour and is both the contemplation and interpretation of life. His simplest definition of humour says this compactly:

> Humor may be defined as the kindly contemplation of the incongruities of life, and the artistic expression thereof.[35]

The emphasis all through his theory of humour is on the two most important words in the above definition — "kindly" and "incongruities". His underlying thesis is that humanity has on the whole grown better since earlier times and that we today are less cruel than our predecessors and do not have their capacity for total indifference. Likewise, humour has travelled an upward path and has grown more kindly through the ages. But particularly since the First World War has there been an increased need for the realization that humour is the saving grace of humanity:

> We live thus in an age of preoccupation, of apprehension, of fear. All the old dead certainties are gone. Mankind, restless and distressed, is passing into a kind of mass hysteria and apprehension. In such a situation it is easy to see and to say that we have greater need of humour. But can we get it?[36]

Leacock became very discouraged with the humorous products of the twentieth century. He believed that humour today is losing touch with the creative impulse:

---

[35] Humor and Humanity, p. 3.

[36] The Greatest Pages of American Humour, p. 230.

> The presentation of humour by the voice alone is already creating a new technique, a new set of symbols. Presently the perfection of television and the invention of talking books will further alter the conditions. The nineteenth century took its humour through books, the printed page stimulated the mind to create a picture. The twentieth century will take its humour direct, with words and pictures all supplied, nothing to invent. The effect may dull, in the spectator, the warm power of creation; or it may not.[37]

For this reason Leacock believed that it is the duty of the humorist to be an optimist, as he himself always tried to be. He felt that the humorist should present a world where human kindliness and human freedom are present and there is nothing of real cruelty, tyranny, or the deep notes of tragedy. In his last writings, Leacock continued to emphasize this element in humorous writing and he became more concerned with the need for humour to act as a means of consolation for the daily frets of life, and to offer sympathetic insight into the mysteries and sorrows of life itself.

---

37 The Greatest Pages of American Humour, pp. 231-232.

C H A P T E R N I N E:

a) YEARS OF RETIREMENT (1936-1944)

b) CONCLUSION

"There is a well-worn rubric of the Church that runs, 'while we have time ...' Andrew's death makes me think of it — the pity that we cannot, while we have time, value one another better. We do not see till it is too late. The light has gone."

The Boy I Left Behind Me, pp. 138-139.

During the last years of his life, Leacock wrote prodigiously. He felt somehow that as long as he kept on writing, he would keep on living. Consequently, he took a great deal of pride in each new book as it appeared, and in all, some fifteen books were published between the time of his retirement from McGill in 1936 and his death in 1944. The books which appeared during this period deal, for the most part, with more serious subject matter than his earlier books, but they have the same broad popular appeal because of the informal style. Even in those books which were supposedly written to please his general reading public, the tone is more serious and the humour mellower. Because he had more time than before to devote to his writings, he prided himself on the craftsmanship of his last books. He wrote of what he liked, foregoing the merely topical material of his earlier books, and concentrating on his favourite subjects, one of which was history.

In dealing with a subject like history, he liked to begin at the very beginning. According to John Culliton, when Leacock gave a six-lecture series on the problem of deepening the St. Lawrence Waterway, "After the fourth lecture, a member of the class was approached and asked, 'How far have you got in deepening the St. Lawrence?' 'The first white man arrived yesterday,' he replied."[1] Similarly, when he wrote Canada:

---

[1] John Culliton, p. 24.

The Foundations of Its Future, Leacock felt that the only way to describe the silent growth of the nation was to start with Creation itself. He says in the preface:

> We can best learn to value this heritage of freedom by reflecting on its history. We can best appreciate the present in the light of the past, and in the same light we can realize the measure of our duty and obligations towards the future.[2]

His approach to history was informal, yet the style never loses dignity. What he offers is more a commentary on history than a factual textbook. His books on history combine education and instruction, but the reader needs a little a priori knowledge in order to appreciate fully Leacock's comments on the important figures of history. Canada: The Foundations of Its Future (1941) and Montreal, Seaport and City (1942), although they do not lie within the scope of this paper, must be mentioned because they are good examples of the same relaxed and yet well-informed style that was evident in his biographies of Charles Dickens and Mark Twain.

In the autumn following his retirement from McGill, Stephen Leacock discovered the West. Together with his son, Stevie, he set out on November 25, 1936 "to take some impressions off the Canadian West." He gave public lectures in all the important centres between Fort William and Victoria B.C., and returned home early in the new year. He says: "Going West, to a Canadian, is like going after the Holy Grail to

---

[2] Stephen Leacock, Author's Foreword, Canada: The Foundations of Its Future (Montreal, 1941), xxvii.

to a knight of King Arthur. All Canadian families have had, like mine, their Western Odyssey."[3] The result of that trip was a new book, My Discovery of the West, for which he was given the Governor General's Award. Unlike My Discovery of England which was a serio-comic book, My Discovery of the West is entirely serious. In it he discusses the social, economic and political forces which have gone into the making of the Canadian West. In his treatment of such topics as the farm situation, tariff, immigration and social credit, he compares the attitudes of Easterners and Westerners in order to show how greatly the two differ.

But to readers of his more humorous works, Leacock did more than discover the West during this trip. He "discovered" his remarkable uncle, E. P. Leacock, whom he claimed to be one of the outstanding living characters of the Winnipeg Boom. E. P. Leacock makes his first appearance in My Discovery of the West where he is described as "an adventurous spirit, as visionary as Tartarin, as loud as Falstaff, bearded and jovial as a Plantagenet."[4] But in this book he is presented simply as a historical figure who took part in the hectic times when the West was opening up. As Leacock explains elsewhere, in the Manitoba of the 1880's hopes ran high and everyone was transformed into a character, as they always are in any boom time:

---

[3] Stephen Leacock, Preface, My Discovery of the West (Toronto, 1937).

[4] My Discovery of the West, p. 48.

> Life comes to a focus; it is all here and now, all present, no past and no outside -- just a clatter of hammers and saws, rounds of drink and rolls of money. In such an atmosphere every man seems a remarkable fellow, a man of exception; individuality separates out and character blossoms like a rose.[5]

Later Leacock must have realized that the colourful personality and exploits of his remarkable uncle were ripe material for the humorist because E. P. Leacock began to appear in a number of his other books. His first major appearance was in a sketch written for the Reader's Digest[6] and later incorporated as the title sketch in My Remarkable Uncle (1942). Here E. P. Leacock emerges as a semi-fictional character but "his character was so exceptional that it needs nothing but plain narration. It was so exaggerated already that you couldn't exaggerate it."[7] In the simple narrative he traces E. P. Leacock's career from the time that he arrives in Canada, goes out West to make his fortune, to his return as an almost broken man to England where he spent the rest of his life as the business manager of a monastic order. In this sketch Leacock concentrates on telling the life story and gives only a cursory examination of his remarkable uncle's more exceptional personality traits. At the end of the story E. P. Leacock becomes a pathetic figure, but the sketch just misses pathos because throughout the author's own personality dominates that of his creation.

---

5 Happy Stories, p. 162.

6 Stephen Leacock, "The Most Unforgettable Character I've Met," Reader's Digest, XXXIX (July, 1941), 18-22.

7 My Remarkable Uncle, p. 3.

But in Happy Stories written a year before Leacock's death, his remarkable uncle becomes a truly humorous conception with a life all his own. In a lengthly sketch describing his exploits, E. P. Leacock is seen as a lovable swindler who figures in some of the most important events which went into the making of the Canadian West, but who manages always to get the best of every situation. He is removed from the literal atmosphere of truth, given a new name, and placed in the freer atmosphere of fiction, where he is surrounded by a set of colourful but minor characters. E. P. is the spirit of the times and the master of the events. Leacock does not dwell on the various episodes in the life of his remarkable uncle, but selects only those in which certain facets of his personality can be brought out.

Leacock begins with his uncle's conquest of Georgina County, a preliminary to his exploits in Winnipeg. At the beginning of the story, E. P. is pictured as a kind of Josh Smith, but more worldly-wise. Other sides of his personality are brought out as he begins to make his fortune in the boom times in Winnipeg. E. P. has many schemes -- he makes himself president of a bank that never opens, head of a brewery for brewing the Red River, and secretary-treasurer of a railway that is never built. He claims intimate friendship with members of the nobility and with political leaders in England, and thereby gains not only prestige and a seat in the Manitoba Legislature, but abundant and ready sources of cash. But even though he knows how to talk people into backing his enterprises, "this

does not mean that E. P. was in any sense a crook, in any degree dishonest. His bills to him were just 'deferred pay,' like the British debts to the United States. He never did, never contemplated a crooked deal in his life. All his grand schemes were as open as sunlight -- and as empty."[8]

When E. P. makes his entry into social life, he establishes himself in a large mansion, claims ducal ancestry for himself, and engages a set of servants whom he endows with noble lineage:

> As Harris went out with a tray, E. P. would whisper behind his hand to his guests, "An illegitimate son of the Prince of Wales." Harris's mother hadn't known this. But any one could see that if the Prince of Wales had had an illegitimate son, Harris would be just the kind of illegitimate son the Prince of Wales would have wished to have.[9]

E. P. finds a suitable partner in the "honourable" Mrs. Dacres and together they ride the crest of the boom. When the boom breaks suddenly, E. P. is one of the biggest losers but he does not go under. He charms people into giving him money and when that fails, credit. The Riel Rebellion offers a new frontier for him to try his talents. He raises a small band of Irregulars from the few friends that remain. When his troop is captured by Indians, E. P. makes friends with the Indians, teaches them to play poker, and takes them back as hostages to Winnipeg. The depression again settles down on him, but not for long. He receives his first authentic cable from England informing him that he has been awarded the D.S.O. for his services during the rebellion and has been made an

---

[8] My Remarkable Uncle, p. 9.

[9] Happy Stories, p. 164.

Honorary Colonel. His wife, likewise, comes into a great deal of money and the piece ends with E. P. setting out once again in a blaze of glory to conquer the West.

The gradual emergence of E. P. Leacock from the historical person in My Discovery of the West to the truly humorous character in Happy Stories is particularly interesting to the student of Leacock's art, for it amply shows how Leacock's mind worked when he was thinking a character or a humorous story into existence. It was stated earlier that Stephen Leacock needed a great deal of time and thought before producing his best work. Once he had found a character which could become the source of an amusing tale, Leacock had to let his imagination play around with it. Then he shaped and molded the character by talking it over with "the boys" and by watching for their reactions. When he was sure that he had a character fully developed for humorous purposes, he set it to paper. He used this method time and again with success.

After discovering the historical person, E. P. Leacock, whom he remembered from his childhood days, it took him several years to shape E. P. sufficiently for a humorous sketch.[10] In his first attempt to fictionalize him, Leacock shows equal interest in E.P.'s character and exploits, with the result that Leacock's own personality transcends that of his creation. But in Happy Stories he concentrates on E. P. himself. He took the earlier sketch in My Remarkable Uncle and used the beginning

---

10 For the difference between a character in life and a humorous, fictional character, see above pp. 170-171.

of it word for word, but when he came to E. P.'s adventures in the West, he expanded the sketch, and the character became completely fictional. Here the episodes, although they seem melodramatic when taken out of context, are devised to bring out certain facets of E. P.'s personality, and the character of the man is molded into one of the most enduring humorous creations that Leacock ever produced. It is interesting to speculate that had Leacock lived a few more years, he might have produced a universally humorous conception of the growth of the Canadian West with E. P. Leacock, as Mark Twain in Huckleberry Finn produced a universal character of the American frontier.

But good though E. P. might be as a humorous character, he is not great. As a person he was a classic example of the remittance man blown up to colossal size. As a comic character, E. P. had an immense amount of potential; but from the fictional point of view, he was left in embryonic form. Leacock's imagination was not powerfully creative enough. He worked in short sketches which make full use of the techniques of humour, but which do not have anything more than journalistic value. Although he admired Dickens more than any other writer, Leacock knew that he could never emulate him, that he could never produce a full comic portrait as Dickens would have done with a character like E. P. Leacock, Leacock's greatest limitation as a creative artist lies in his inability to make a cluster of comic incidents and characters coalesce into a sustained story. A rounded portrait of E. P. would have become an

eternal character. But in the manner in which Leacock's creation stands, E. P. remains just another of the long list of comic characters that run through his works.

Happy Stories, on the whole, deals with humorous characters of one kind or another, but none of them is as powerful as E. P. Leacock. In this book the reader briefly re-encounters the Mariposan characters, but this time the purpose is specific -- a Victory Loan Drive. This book is written in Leacock's mellowest and best vein of humour which is a combination of shrewd observation and outrageous distortion. It is full of gusto and whimsicality, closest in spirit to the earliest books, particularly the Sunshine Sketches of a Little Town. It also contains the warmth so often lacking in the products of his middle years when he was a little overwhelmed by his own success as a humorist. His wife's death and his enforced retirement had thrown him off-balance, but he seemed to be getting back on the rails again. Happy Stories is one of his more delightful books.

However, he seemed to be turning away from the rollicking fun and nonsense of his earlier books as well as from his preoccupation with the follies and foibles of the contemporary scene. As he said of Dickens:

> It is obvious that authors write themselves out; that some songs can be sung once only, whether early in life or late; that the wear and tear of overwork and overworry can impair any literary output; that commercial reasons will force publication where art would demand delay.[11]

---

[11] Charles Dickens, His Life and Work, p. 201.

In the books written immediately after his retirement, Funny Pieces (1936), Here Are My Lectures and Stories (1937), Model Memoirs (1938) and Too Much College (1939), he summarizes some of the main themes of his earlier work such as follies in contemporary fiction, education and educational methods. But he also introduces more serious subject matter which deals with the realities of life and death, the emergency of war and the need for humour in the reconstruction of a better world.

The world of the early 1940's was once again torn with war, tragedy and destruction. Leacock knew that humour is not a weapon against war although humour breaks through the show of things, through social pretensions and transitory dignities, and it makes man realize how little is in them and how laughable they are in the face of death, war and eternity. Leacock believed that humour, although not a weapon against war, is still the last refuge of sorrow or oppression, be it public or private. He tried to give his wartime readers a little optimism and a fuller understanding of the need for humour as a means of offering sympathetic insight into life. As he had called in earlier writings for a more humane approach in educational methods, he now called for a new spirit in the human heart, insisting that for a better world we must first reconstruct ourselves:

> But the truth is that this, our actual world would be as good as the bright world of imagination if we would only let it be so. Everything is there, the smiling abundance of our unrealized paradise, the

good-will toward men that all men feel and none dare act upon. It is all there for the asking, if we can only cast aside from the gateway the evil spirits of fear and apprehension and distrust which keep us from our kingdom.[12]

Because he was able to spend more time at his writing, he chose to write about those things in which he was most interested. Even in the lighter humorous pieces, the humour is more mellow and the craftsmanship more exact than in his earlier books. It is obvious that Leacock had undergone a change of attitude about his humorous writings. After his retirement from McGill -- and for the first time in his career as a humorist -- he really looked at his own work with the eye of a professional writer. The result of this change of attitude is that the later books are far better written than his other ones.

It is also evident from the subject matter and the style of these books that Leacock realized that he was becoming an old man. He looked at the old man in himself and examined him with both bewilderment and amusement, remembering that in his younger days he had not been very tolerant of old age and its restrictions. He once wrote in jocular fashion:

> When my declining years their shadows lengthen,
> I'll end in an irregular declension.[13]

When he studied himself he found that the years had made him kinder in his judgement of others. He looked to humour to provide him

---

12 Model Memoirs, pp. 315-316.

13 College Days, p. 78.

with consolation for the daily frets of old age, and to offer reconciliation with the mysteries, the sorrows and the short-comings of the world we live in as well as for life itself:

> My friend, this is a parable. As is the Atlantic voyage, so is our little pilgrimage in the sunshine from shore to shore, whose short days are all too often marred by the mean disputes and the poor worries that in the end signify nothing. While there is still time, let us look about us to the horizon.[14]

Leacock's favourite book of his last years was How To Write, a first-rate craft book which summarizes his ideas on humour and writing in general. Like his books on history, this book is both entertaining and instructive at the same time. It offers some shrewd advice to the young writer:

> The main point is that writing, whether done in and by college or without a college, has got to be done for and by oneself. If you want to write, start and write down your thoughts. If you haven't any thoughts, don't write them down. But if you have, write them down; thoughts about anything, no matter what, in your own way, with no idea of selling them or being an author.[15]

He loved this book mostly because he had written it to please himself, without any concern over money, sales, or other pressures which had previously caused him to publish inferior work. He says: "This book How To Write is like a favorite child to me because I wrote it purely to suit myself with no eye on editors or sales or the public. If that means that it fails then it is a favorite all the more, as the feeble child

---

[14] Winnowed Wisdom, p. 174.

[15] How To Write, p. 20.

always is to the fond parent."[16] This book became one of the most widely read of all of Leacock's books and was adopted in South Africa as a reference text in 1950 when some 1500 copies were ordered.

Leacock says in How To Write, "Each of us is the custodian of one first class story, the story of his own life. Every human life is a story -- is interesting if it can be conveyed."[17] He seems to have taken his own advice, for in the year before his death he started an autobiography, of which only four chapters were completed before his death in March 1944. In that portion which he finished, he deals with his early childhood, his life on the farm and his young manhood up to the time that he became a Master at Upper Canada College. The publishers titled the book, The Boy I Left Behind Me:

> At the time of his death in March 1944 Stephen Leacock had completed four chapters of memoirs which were to have been the beginning of his autobiography .... It was his own idea to call the autobiography, "My Memories and What I Think," and the title would be as truly descriptive of the little book presented here. However, as it has perforce been narrowed to his youth, in the long look back from his seventies, we think he would have liked our title, The Boy I Left Behind Me.[18]

It is unfortunate that this book was never finished for it shows Leacock at his best -- tender and mellow. Most readers know Leacock's early biographical sketch in Sunshine Sketches, which in humorous fashion places the important dates in his life. But The Boy I Left Behind Me gives the reader far more insight into Leacock, the man. It describes in particular detail the circumstances which forced him into the teaching

---

16 Stephen Leacock, "Letter to G. R. Lomer," Stephen Leacock: A Check-List and Index of His Writings, comp. G. R. Lomer (Ottawa, 1954), p. 33.

17 How To Write, p. 16.

18 Publisher's Note, Stephen Leacock, The Boy I Left Behind Me (New York, 1946).

profession and later paved the way for his career as a writer of humour. He gives a somewhat distorted picture of the hardships of his youth as he remembers them after a long, full life, but some of the bitterness and misery which he describes is still so painful to him, that even in the telling, the reader can see that the hurt is still there. On the whole, it is written in Leacock's best style -- genial, discursive, full of asides, and often outspoken, especially against the school-teaching profession. It is a warm book, richly sprinkled with humour, and though full of sentiment, would never be called sentimental. The Boy I Left Behind Me is indispensable to the student of Leacock, the man and his art.

During the last years of his life there was a slowing down of physical energy, although his mind was keen and alert and he was industrious to the end. Leacock became fascinated with the immense potential of Canada's natural resources.[19] The North Country, in particular, intrigued him:

> The North Country, with its immensity, with its endlessness, seized and held him. For hours he would read about it, talk about it, and explore it. Books, maps, more books, more maps, strewn about like the country itself. Then, as the evening ended, he would say, with something that sounded like a sigh, "A country's wealth is what you walk on." He would have liked to walk it.[20]

But cancer, the disease which had caused his wife's death, was eating away at his body and he could not spend as much time at his writing

---

19 See My Discovery of the West, pp. 242-254.

20 John Culliton, pp. 24-25.

as before. When asked to contribute to the McGill News, he wrote to the President of the McGill Graduate Society:

Dear Fraser,
I sat down to explain that the state of my health forbad me to write more than a couple of sentences, -- but I found that like all professors I couldn't be brief if I tried.
Don't lose this: there's no copy: It's right off the pen, the only way to write things.[21]

In March 1944, Stephen Leacock entered the Toronto General Hospital for a throat operation. But it was too late to arrest the disease and he died on the night of March 28, 1944. Here is an account of his last hours:

Accompanied by a fellow X-ray worker in the daily round of duty, we saw Stephen Leacock but an hour or so before his passing. He was very tired and feeble, his breathing labored but he greeted us with that ready smile of his and there was a twinkle in his eyes. "Did I behave pretty well?" he asked when we had made the radiographs. And when we assured him he had behaved splendidly, the smile came again, and he waved a last goodbye.[22]

His body was cremated and the ashes interred at the Churchyard of St. George's Church, Sutton Ontario, where his mother was also buried. To the end he retained his sense of humour, his ability to seek out the humbug, and his belief in the essential goodness and kindliness of man. Stephen Leacock had enjoyed life and he died knowing that he had accomplished to the best of his ability a difficult job. He said in a book written two years before his death:

---

21 Stephen Leacock, "Letter to Keith Fraser," dated February 19, 1944. Quoted in McGill News, XXV (Summer, 1944), 8.

22 Percy Ghent, "Leacock Manuscript Sent to Collector with Jovial Note," Toronto Telegram (April 11, 1944).

> This is the summary of the matter that as for old age, there's nothing to it, for the individual looked at by himself. It can only be reconciled with our view of life in so far as it has something to pass on, the new life of children and of grandchildren, or if not that, at least some hope to say, non omnis moriar (I shall not altogether die).
> Give me my stick. I'm going out on to No Man's Land. I'll face it.[23]

II

Humour can be dissected but when the task is finished, the results are often disappointing and far removed from the initial intention of the analyst. Certainly, Stephen Leacock himself would never have approved of the purely scientific approach to his work. The best approach, we believe, is the one that has been used here, that of examining the life and personality of the man alongside his works.

Humour is often the last refuge of the hard pressed soul. In this thesis it has been shown that both time and money were always important to Stephen Leacock and were directly related to both the quantity and quality of the work which he turned out. The fear of poverty was something which followed him through life and was, indeed, the motivating force behind his first attempts at written humour. Although he was born with an exceptional sense of humour, it is probable that Leacock would never have become a literary humorist, had he found some other way of making enough money to suit his needs. But he discovered that by writing humorous sketches for the popular magazines of the 1890's, he could make enough money to continue his studies and enter a more rewarding profession

---

23 My Remarkable Uncle, pp. 300-301.

than school teaching. His early pieces, therefore, are for the most part journalistic and the style, because it was not intended to have any lasting value, experimental.

In this thesis we have traced the career of the man from teacher to active writer, through the years of prosperity and then of retirement. It was not until he was forty-one years of age that Stephen Leacock became a literary humorist in the real sense of the word. Early in the century he had started as a lecturer at McGill, the first and only home he ever really had. There he found a station in life which he thought dignified, a satisfying fixed position with ample leisure time. Again he looked around for some means of augmenting his salary. He hit upon the idea of collecting his earlier pieces, some of which still retained their freshness after nearly fifteen years, and he published his first book of humour. From that time on, he embarked on a career terminated only by death.

Success as a humorist did a great many things for Stephen Leacock, besides bringing him material comforts. His early pieces had been apologetic in tone because he was a shy, silent young man who was not sure what his humorous writings could do to his newly acquired reputation as an Economist. When he became more confident of his humorous self, the shyness vanished and it was replaced by a broad smile. He had always liked to share his fun with his friends; now he became more sure of himself in public. Sometimes the laughter was a little forced, a little too loud and a little off-key for the times, but on the whole the inner warmth of the man's personality pervades his writings. His last works, by far the best, are full of whimsicality, gusto and mellowness.

Leacock was a humorist in life and he was in his art. He revealed himself more than he realized in the quality of his work. Certain circumstances such as his quarrel with his father, the death of his wife, and his enforced retirement, caused deep hurt and resentment and his writing suffered as a consequence. Sometimes he had so much on his mind that he could not give the time and thought needed for his best work. His only consolation at these times lay in the financial returns from the sale of his books. He repeatedly apologized for his inferior work:

> In a sense and within limits, it is of course true that all art should be of this character [i.e. grow as a wayside flower without cultivation]. It is contaminated the moment it is connected with a money return, with an ulterior purpose, with limitations imposed by "adaptability" to a particular periodical, and even perhaps the minute it is connected with paid teaching and studied effects. But all that is only a part of the imperfection of the world in which we live. Art cannot be entirely free and self-prompted and self-inspired.[24]

Because of his concern over time and money, it has been shown that Leacock was entangled more than superficially in the contradictions of the society which he sought to expose in his writings. And yet, although money was the initial force behind his first humorous writings, in later life he found humour redeeming in everyday living. During his lifetime he had many interests -- Classical and Modern Languages, Economics, Education and Humour, but none of them as sustained or as lasting as his interest in Humour, its theory and practice. In his last years when he had more time to devote to his writing and did not have to worry about

---

[24] Humor and Humanity, pp. 188-189.

money matters, he acquired a truly professional attitude to his writing and the craftsmanship improved considerably. In his old age, as well, he found the writing of humour a means of compensating actively for daily frets and fears.

At the height of his career Leacock said that every humorist has to face the fact that the "real" men, the serious men of this world, will dismiss him as being a little childish. Although he often played the fool, Stephen Leacock could not be dismissed as an irresponsible fun-maker. As a minor consideration it must be remembered that he was a Doctor seven times over -- of Philosophy from Chicago, of Laws from Queens and McGill, of Letters from Dartmouth, Brown and Toronto, and of Civil Law from Bishop's. It has been seen in this thesis that Leacock was a gifted educator who exerted a powerful influence on his students and that the problem of educational methods in the modern world was one of the chief concerns of his life. He believed that the class-room should be a forum of discussion where minds meet to talk over and learn new ideas and to evaluate old theories in the light of newer needs.

His was an independent mind and his writing amply shows that he was never afraid to express himself freely and frankly on any subject in which he was interested. Beneath the foolery there was a great deal of common sense. He was a serious humorist and in this respect he can be placed in the great tradition of Humour where humour becomes an attribute of sanity, and where the lopsided vision, while pointing out the incongruities of society and of life, saves the humorist from the folly of

taking his own seriousness too seriously.

Stephen Leacock was a moralist in the sense that he delighted in all of life. His object was to create amusement, but he also had a deep understanding of human nature. He showed up the follies of certain fashions of the day in culture, entertainment and morality, but he did so in a way that appealed at once to the mind and heart of the reader. Like other serious humorists he knew the value of humour as a social corrective, and "he was a reformer of the kind that lops off withered branches with due care for the life of the tree."[25]

As a literary humorist, his mind worked in three directions — humour simply for the sake of fun and recreation, humour as a social corrective, and humour of sympathy and insight into life. In this thesis the three aspects of his writing have been discussed, and those books which represent each aspect at its best have been carefully studied. Among them were Literary Lapses and Nonsense Novels, Sunshine Sketches and Arcadian Adventures, My Discovery of England, and The Boy I Left Behind Me. Because of his contribution to the study of the technique of humour, Leacock's theory of humour as well as his own stylistic devices have been examined. As a humorist, he was cursed with facility. His interests were many and varied and he often chose to write about those bright gems on the surface of the mind without searching too deeply. But what he had to say if not deep, was always sensible. Those pieces

---

[25] Sedgewick, p. 18.

have the most lasting value which depend for effect not on individual tricks of verbal humour or on the appeal of some topical issue, but on the more subtle blending of subject matter, deeply rooted in human nature, and of style, generously diffused with his personal sense of humour.

He created a distinctive style of his own in which the quality of the spoken word was a notable feature. As a writer he served to bridge the gap between British and American viewpoints on humour and he drew attention to Canadian life and literature:

> It was as if he invited and expected everybody to be at ease, as indeed everyone was.... If a Canadian worries about "importance," he need not feel nervous at seeing his fellow-countryman at table with the incontestably Important, as he might if he saw Ralph Connor in the company of Thackeray, or Miss de la Roche in the company of Miss Jane Austen. Certainly Stephen Leacock would feel no nervousness himself. He is not one of the Great Ones, but he may sit at the same table.[26]

---

[26] Sedgewick, p. 21.

B I B L I O G R A P H Y

PRIMARY MATERIAL - BOOKS

Leacock, Stephen, Afternoons in Utopia. Toronto, 1932.

Leacock, Stephen, Arcadian Adventures With The Idle Rich. New York, 1914.

Leacock, Stephen, Baldwin, Lafontaine, Hincks. Toronto, 1907.

Leacock, Stephen, Behind The Beyond. New York, 1920.

Leacock, Stephen, The Boy I Left Behind Me. New York, 1946.

Leacock, Stephen, The Boy I Left Behind Me. London, 1947.

Leacock, Stephen, Canada, The Foundations of its Future. Montreal, 1941.

Leacock, Stephen, Charles Dickens, His Life and Work. London, 1933.

Leacock, Stephen, College Days. London, 1923.

Leacock, Stephen, The Dry Pickwick. London, 1932.

Leacock, Stephen, Elements of Political Science. Boston, 1906.

Leacock, Stephen, Essays and Literary Studies. Toronto, 1916.

Leacock, Stephen, Frenzied Fiction. Toronto, 1918.

Leacock, Stephen, Funny Pieces. New York, 1936.

Leacock, Stephen, Further Foolishness. Toronto, 1916.

Leacock, Stephen, The Garden of Folly. Toronto, 1924.

Leacock, Stephen, The Greatest Pages of American Humour; a Study of the Rise and Development of Humorous Writings in America With Selections from the Most Notable of the Humorists. London, 1937.

Leacock, Stephen, The Greatest Pages of Charles Dickens; a Biographical Reader and a Chronological Selection from the Works of Dickens with a Commentary on his Life and Art. Garden City, New York, 1934.

Leacock, Stephen, Happy Stories. New York, 1943.

Leacock, Stephen, Hellements of Hickonomics. New York, 1936.

Leacock, Stephen, Here Are My Lectures and Stories. New York, 1937.

Leacock, Stephen, The Hohenzollerns in America. Toronto, 1919.

Leacock, Stephen, How To Write. New York, 1943.

Leacock, Stephen, Humor and Humanity. New York, 1938.

Leacock, Stephen, Humor: Its Theory and Technique. Toronto, 1935.

Leacock, Stephen, The Iron Man and The Tin Woman. London, 1929.

Leacock, Stephen, Last Leaves. Toronto, 1945.

Leacock, Stephen, Laugh Parade. New York, 1940.

Leacock, Stephen, Laugh With Leacock. New York, 1947.

Leacock, Stephen, The Leacock Book, arranged and introduced by Ben Travers. London, 1930.

Leacock, Stephen, The Leacock Roundabout. New York, 1952.

Leacock, Stephen, Lincoln Frees The Slaves. New York, 1934.

Leacock, Stephen, Literary Lapses. Montreal, 1910.

Leacock, Stephen, Literary Lapses. New York, 1943.

Leacock, Stephen, Mark Twain. New York, 1933.

Leacock, Stephen, The Methods of Mr. Sellyer. New York, 1914.

Leacock, Stephen, Model Memoirs. New York, 1938.

Leacock, Stephen, Montreal, Seaport and City. Garden City, New York, 1942.

Leacock, Stephen, Moonbeams From A Larger Lunacy. Toronto, 1915.

Leacock, Stephen, My Discovery of England. Toronto, 1922.

Leacock, Stephen, My Discovery of the West. Toronto, 1937.

Leacock, Stephen, My Remarkable Uncle. New York, 1942.

Leacock, Stephen, Nonsense Novels. Montreal, 1911.

Leacock, Stephen, Nonsense Novels. London, 1919.

Leacock, Stephen, Over The Footlights. London, 1923.

Leacock, Stephen, The Perfect Salesman, edited by E.V. Knox. New York, 1934.

Leacock, Stephen, The Pursuit of Knowledge. New York, 1934.

Leacock, Stephen, Short Curcuits. Toronto, 1928.

Leacock, Stephen, Sunshine Sketches of a Little Town. Toronto, 1912.

Leacock, Stephen, Too Much College. New York, 1939.

Leacock, Stephen, The Unsolved Riddle of Social Justice. Toronto, 1920.

Leacock, Stephen, Wet Wit and Dry Humour. New York, 1931.

Leacock, Stephen, While There Is Time. Toronto, 1945.

Leacock, Stephen, Winnowed Wisdom. Toronto, 1926.

Leacock, Stephen, Winsome Winnie. Toronto, 1920.

PRIMARY MATERIAL - ARTICLES

Leacock, Stephen, "Academic Freedom," Maclean's, XLIX (February 1, 1936), 14-15, 38-39.

Leacock, Stephen, "American Humor," Living Age, CCLXXXIII (October 10, 1914), 92-102.

Leacock, Stephen, "Andrew Macphail," Queens Quarterly, XLV (Winter, 1938), 445-452.

Leacock, Stephen, "Barbershop Psychology Lesson Aids War Loan Certificate Sale," The Montreal Gazette, CLXXII (May 4, 1943),15.

Leacock, Stephen, "The Book Agent: or, Why do People Buy Books?" The Canadian Bookman, I (January, 1919), 17-19.

Leacock, Stephen, "Case of Whiskey too Sacrificial, Mariposa Loan Head Gets Cane," The Montreal Gazette, CLXXII (May 7, 1943),13.

Leacock, Stephen, "Charles Dickens and Canada," Queens Quarterly, XLVI (February, 1939), 28-37.

Leacock, Stephen, "Charles Thompson Noble," McGill News, XII (March, 1931), 53-55.

Leacock, Stephen, "Christmas 1941," New World, II (January, 1942), 112,169.

Leacock, Stephen, "Come Up The Mountain With Stephen Leacock," Maclean's, LVI (February 1, 1943), 19-20, 24-25.

Leacock, Stephen, "A Convenient Calendar for Future Years," Old McGill, XXXIV (1931), 62.

Leacock, Stephen, "Courage, An Interlude on the South Coast of England," The Montreal Standard, XLIII (October 26, 1940), 11.

Leacock, Stephen, "The Decay of Fiction," The Varsity, X (October 21, 1890), 28-29.

Leacock, Stephen, "The Decline of the Drama," Some Canadian Essays, edited by Norris Hodgins. London, 1932, pp. 115-121.

Leacock, Stephen, "A Diary of the League of Nations, from our Special Correspondent at Geneva," Saturday Evening Post,CXCVIII (June 26, 1926), 11.

Leacock, Stephen, "The Difference of Degree," The Reader's Digest, XXXVIII (May, 1941), 70.

Leacock, Stephen, "Economic Paradox is Uncovered in Wake of Farm Auction Sale," The Montreal Gazette, CLXXII (May 8, 1943), 21.

Leacock, Stephen, "Education and Empire Unity," Builders of the Canadian Commonwealth, edited by George H. Locke. Toronto, 1926, pp. 211-226.

Leacock, Stephen, "Emigration in English Literature," London Quarterly Review, CCLXX (April, 1938), 204-220.

Leacock, Stephen, "The Errors of Santa Claus," Puck, LXXX (December 2, 1916), 17, 48.

Leacock, Stephen, "The Establishment of the University of Moon College," The Varsity, X (1890), 140.

Leacock, Stephen, "Farewell to Farms," The Commentator, II (August, 1937), 9-11.

Leacock, Stephen, "Fiery Scot to Wreck Mariposa if Leacock's Town fails in Loan," The Montreal Gazette, CLXXII (May 6, 1943), 15.

Leacock, Stephen, "The Flight of College Time," The McGill Fortnightly Review, I (November 21, 1925), 3.

Leacock, Stephen, "Foggy Finance," The Commentator, II (November, 1937), 17-21.

Leacock, Stephen, "Forty Years Ago," Puck, LXXXI (April 14, 1917), 10.

Leacock, Stephen, "Free, But a Bit Forlorn," The Commentator, II (September, 1937), 19-22.

Leacock, Stephen, "Home Again," Truth, XIV (October 2, 1895), 4.

Leacock, Stephen, "How Gorillas Talk," Truth, XV (April 18, 1896), 17.

Leacock, Stephen, "On Humor," Maclean's, LXVIII (October 15, 1955), 32-34.

Leacock, Stephen, "Humour as I see it and something about Humour in Canada," Maclean's, XXIX (May, 1916), 11-13.

Leacock, Stephen, "I Squirm to Recall," Reader's Digest, XLI (July, 1942), 43-44.

Leacock, Stephen, "I'll Stay in Canada," Reader's Digest, XXVIII (May, 1936), 19-21.

Leacock, Stephen, "Ills of the Present System of Education Deplored," McGill Daily, XXII (February 10, 1933), 1,4.

Leacock, Stephen, "Imogene: A Legend of the Days of Chivalry," The Varsity, XI (October 6, 1891), 2-3.

Leacock, Stephen, "Initial Complaint," Reader's Digest, XXXIII (November, 1938), 22.

Leacock, Stephen, "The Lake Simcoe Country," Canadian Geographical Journal, XI (September, 1935), 109-116.

Leacock, Stephen, "Leacock Finds Loan Wont Bust Us: Call to Ilsley Found Unnecessary," The Montreal Gazette, CLXXII (May 1, 1943), 13.

Leacock, Stephen, "Leacock tells how Sultan Abdul Raised Loans by Head Chopping," The Montreal Gazette, CLXXII (April 29, 1943), 13.

Leacock, Stephen, "Leacock writes off Boob Smith: He's Made all the Sacrifices he can," The Montreal Gazette, CLXXII (April 30, 1943), 13.

Leacock, Stephen, "Leacock's Mariposa out of joint as Loan Drive Cuts Social Lines," The Montreal Gazette, CLXXII (May 15, 1943), 23.

Leacock, Stephen, "Letter on the Death of John McCrae," McGill Daily, XXVII (February 2, 1938), 1.

Leacock, Stephen, "Looking After Brown," Old McGill, VIII (1904), 226-228.

Leacock, Stephen, "Looking Back on College," McGill News, XVII (Summer, 1936), 7-8.

Leacock, Stephen, "A Lost Work By the Sanctum Philosopher," The Varsity, X (November 18, 1890), 76-77.

Leacock, Stephen, "Mark Twain and Canada," Queens Quarterly, XLII (Spring, 1935), 68-81.

Leacock, Stephen, "McGill in 2000 A.D.," Old McGill,XXV (1923), 201.

Leacock, Stephen, "McGill in the West," McGill News, XXXVII (Winter, 1955), 15, 24.

Leacock, Stephen, "The Most Unforgettable Character I've Met," Reader's Digest, XXXIX (July, 1941), 18-22.

Leacock, Stephen, "Mother Goose-Step for Children," The Forum, LXXIX (March, 1928), 365-369.

Leacock, Stephen, "My Delusions," Puck, LXXX (July 29, 1916), 10.

Leacock, Stephen, "My New Year's Resolutions," Puck, LXXXII (January 20, 1918), 9.

Leacock, Stephen, "New Winter Game," Truth, XVI (March 25, 1897), 11.

Leacock, Stephen, "Novel Idea Proposed: An Ambitious Plan for The Daily," McGill Daily, XXI (January 22, 1932), 1.
(January 23, 1932), 2.
(January 25, 1932), 1, 4.
(January 26, 1932), 1.
(January 28, 1932), 2.

Leacock, Stephen, "The Old, Old Trouble," Puck, LXXIX (April 15, 1916), 10.

Leacock, Stephen, "On The Old Homestead," Truth, XV (December 12, 1896), 12.

Leacock, Stephen, "Our Perplexity Column," Puck, LXXX (August 19, 1916), 10.

Leacock, Stephen, "The Perils and Pitfalls of College Journalism," The McGilliad, I (March, 1914), 3.

Leacock, Stephen, "The Philosophy of Love," The Varsity, X (December 9, 1890), 112-113.

Leacock, Stephen, "Piscatorial Perspicacities Make War Loan Publicity Substitude," The Montreal Gazette, CLXXII (May 3,1943), 17.

Leacock, Stephen, "The Puppet Shop," Truth, XIV (August 3, 1895), 10-11.

Leacock, Stephen, "Some Anecdotes of McGill," McGill News, XXIV (Summer, 1943), 31-32.

Leacock, Stephen, "Stories and Story-Tellers," The Outlook, CXXX (February 1, 1922), 183-184.

Leacock, Stephen, "Tattered Guides," Atlantic Monthly, CLVII (February, 1936), 179-181.

Leacock, Stephen, "Telling His Faults," Truth, XIV (December 28, 1895), 15.

Leacock, Stephen, "That Ridiculous War in the East," Grip, XLII (October 6, 1894), 107.

Leacock, Stephen, "Things Wanting At McGill," Old McGill, XXVII (1925), 30.

Leacock, Stephen, "Through a Glass Darkly," Atlantic Monthly, CLVIII (July, 1936), 94-98.

Leacock, Stephen, "Two Humorists: Charles Dickens and Mark Twain," Yale Review, XXIV (September, 1934), 118-129.

Leacock, Stephen, "The Two Milords; or, the Blow of Thunder," John O'London's Weekly, XXXVIII (December 3, 1937), 389,394.

Leacock, Stephen, "Vehicle for Literary Expression is Needed at McGill," McGill Daily, XV (October 28, 1925), 1.

Leacock, Stephen, "What I Read as a Child," The Library and Its Contents, edited by Harriet P. Sawyer. New York, 1925, pp. 143-144.

Leacock, Stephen, "What Is Left of Adam Smith," CJE, I (February, 1935), 41-51.

Leacock, Stephen, "Why Study English," Montreal Star, LXXV (April 20, 1943), 10.

MISCELLANEOUS

Bibliographies

A Bibliography of Stephen Butler Leacock, compiled by McGill University Library School Class of 1935. Montreal, 1935.

Stephen Leacock: A Check-List and Index of his Writings, compiled by Gerhard R. Lomer. Ottawa, 1954.

Letters

Leacock, Stephen, "Letter to W.A. Bell," Quill and Quire, XV (July, 1949), 6-7.

Leacock, Stephen, "Letter to Fraser Keith," McGill News, XXV (Summer, 1944), 8.

Leacock, Stephen, "Letters," in the Collection of the McGill University Library, Montreal Quebec.

Leacock, Stephen, "Letters," in the Collection of the Orillia Public Library, Orillia Ontario.

Leacock, Stephen, "Three Letters," in the Lorne Pierce Collection of the Queens University Library, Kingston Ontario.

Plays based on Leacock's Sketches

Clinton-Baddeley, V. C., Behind The Beyond, adapted from the original by Stephen Leacock. London and Glasgow, 1932.

Clinton-Baddeley, V. C., The Billiard-Room Mystery; or, Who d'you think Did It?, adapted from the original by Stephen Leacock. London and Glasgow, 1934.

Clinton-Baddeley, V. C., The Split in the Cabinet, adapted from the original by Stephen Leacock. London and Glasgow, 1938.

Clinton-Baddeley, V. C., Winsome Winnie, adapted from the original by Stephen Leacock. London and Glasgow, 1932.

Leacock, Stephen and Hastings, Basil Macdonald, "Q"; a farce in one Act. New York, c1915.

Moore, Mavor Sunshine Town; a Musical Play, adapted from the original by Stephen Leacock. Toronto, 1954.

Recordings

Leacock, Stephen, "My Old College, 1843-1943," a transcription recording of a radio broadcast, 1943. Collection of the McGill Graduate Society, Montreal Quebec.

Typescript of a Tape Recording of the Seventh Annual Stephen Leacock Memorial Dinner. Orillia, 1954. Collection of the Orillia Public Library, Orillia Ontario.

SECONDARY READING MATERIAL

Adcock, St. John, "Stephen Leacock," The Glory That Was Grub Street. Toronto, n.d., pp. 181-190.

Allen, C. K., Oh Mr. Leacock! Toronto, 1925.

Aristotle, "The Poetics," translated by Ingram Bywater, Introduction To Aristotle, edited by Richard McKeon. New York, 1947, pp. 624-667.

Armstrong, Martin, Laughter, An Essay. New York, 1928.

Bergson, Henri, Laughter, translated by C. Brereton and F. Rothwell. London, 1911.

Bishop, Morris, editor, A Treasury of British Humor. New York, 1942.

Buckham, John Wright, "The Potency of Paradox," Journal of Philosophy, XLI (January, 1944), 5-12.

Cammaerts, Emile, The Poetry of Nonsense. London, 1925.

Carroll, Lewis, pseudonym of Charles L. Dodgson, The Complete Works of Lewis Carroll, edited and introduced by Alexander Woollcott. London, n.d.

Chesterton, Gilbert Keith, "Gilbert and Sullivan," The Eighteen Eighties, edited by Walter de la Mare. Cambridge, 1930, pp. 136-158.

Collins, J. P., "Professor Stephen Leacock, Ph.D: Savant and Humorist," The Bookman, LI (November, 1910), 39-45.

Culliton, John, "Stephen Leacock," McGill News, XXV (Summer, 1944), 24-25.

Davies, Maurice, Fun, Ancient and Modern. 2 volumes. London, 1878.

Day, J.P., "Professor Leacock at McGill," CJE, X (May, 1944), 226-228.

Deacon, William A., "Leacock Loved The Little Town Which He Christened Mariposa," Orillia Packet and Times (April 6, 1944), 8.

De La Mare, Walter, "Lewis Carroll," The Eighteen Eighties. Cambridge, 1930, pp. 218-255.

Dickens, Charles, The Pickwick Papers. Collins Library of Classics. London, n.d.

Dickson, George and G. Mercer Adam, compilers and editors, A History of Upper Canada College, 1829-1892. Toronto, 1893.

D. S. R., "Caned by Leacock — Famous Humorist As A Pedagogue," Toronto Telegram (April 1, 1944).

Duff, Louis Blake, Stephen Leacock:An Address. Orillia, 1951.

Eastman, Max, The Sense of Humour. New York, 1921.

Edgar, Pelham, "Stephen Leacock," Queens Quarterly, LIII (Summer, 1946), 173-184.

Feibleman, James, "The Meaning of Comedy," Journal of Philosophy, XXXV (August, 1938), 421-432.

Frayne, Trent, "The Erudite Jester of McGill," Maclean's, LXVI (January 1, 1953), 18-19, 37-39.

French, Joseph Lewis, editor, Sixty Years of American Humor. Boston, 1924.

Frye, Northrop, "The Nature of Satire," University of Toronto Quarterly, XIV (1944-1945), 75-89.

Fuller, B. A. G., "Is Reality Really Comic?" Journal of Philosophy, XLIII (October, 1946), 589-98.

Gregory, J. C., The Nature of Laughter. London, 1924.

Greig, John Y. T., The Psychology of Laughter and Comedy. New York, 1923.

Hale, J. R., "Leacock and Orillia," The Orillia Packet and Times (March 30, 1944), 1, 5.

Hazlitt, William, Lectures on the English Comic Writers. New York, 1857.

Hind, C. Lewis, "Stephen Leacock," More Authors and I. New York, 1922, pp. 180-185.

Innis, H. A., "Obituary," CJE, X (May, 1944), 216-226.

Knox, Israel, "The Comic, The Tragic, and the Cynical: Some Notes on their Ethical Dimensions," Ethics, LXII (1951-1952), 210-214.

Knox, Israel, "Towards a Philosophy of Humor," Journal of Philosophy, XLVIII (August, 1951), 541-548.

Lash, Kenneth, "A Theory of the Comic as Insight," Journal of Philosophy, XLV (February, 1948), 113-121.

Lawrence, C.E., "English Humour," Quarterly Review, CCLXX (January, 1938), 132-145.

Leacock, George, "Letter to Harold Hale," dated August 30, 1951. Collection of the Orillia Public Library, Orillia Ontario.

---------- "Leacock: For the Last Time He Says, 'That'll be all for Today," Newsweek, VII (May 16, 1936), 44.

Lower, Arthur, "The Mariposa Belle," Queens Quarterly, LVIII (Summer, 1951), 220-226.

Marble, Anna R., "Whimsicality and Humor," A Study of the Modern Novel. New York, 1928, pp. 185-214.

McArthur, Peter, Stephen Leacock. Toronto, 1923.

Meredith, George, An Essay on Comedy and the Uses of the Comic Spirit. London, 1910.

Milford, Barney, "There's still a lot of Leacock in Orillia," Maclean's, LXVIII (February 15, 1955), 18-19, 80-82.

Munro, D. H., Argument of Laughter. Melbourne, 1951.

Murphy, Bruce, "Stephen Leacock -- Greatest Living Humorist," Ontario Library Review, XII (February, 1928), 67-69.

Murray, W. G., "Stephen Leacock, Some Personal Reminiscences," The McGill Daily, XLI (October 1, 1951), 2,4.

Nimmo, Barbara, "Stephen Leacock, A Personal Note," in Stephen Leacock, The Boy I Left Behind Me. London, 1947, pp. 7-15.

Pacey, Desmond, editor, A Book of Canadian Stories. Toronto, 1950.

Pacey, Desmond, Creative Writing in Canada. Toronto, 1952.

Pacey, Desmond, "Leacock As A Satirist," Queens Quarterly, LVIII (Summer, 1951), 208-219.

Parker, DeWitt H., The Principles of Aesthetics. Boston, 1920.

Pattison, Robert B., "Stephen Leacock at Play," Typescript in the Collection of the Orillia Public Library, Orillia Ontario.

Peterson, Phyllis, "My Heart Belongs to Old McGill," Maclean's, LXIX (January 21, 1956), 18-19, 27-31.

Phelps, Arthur L., Canadian Writers. Toronto, 1951.

Plato, "The Symposium," translated by B. Jowett, The Works of Plato, edited by Irwin Edman. New York, 1928, pp. 333-393.

Repplier, Agnes, In Pursuit of Laughter. Boston, 1936.

Robins, John D. and Margaret V. Ray, editors, A Book of Canadian Humour. Toronto, 1951.

Rourke, Constance, American Humor, A Study of the National Character. New York, 1931.

"R. T. L.", pseudonym of Charles Vining, "Mr. Leacock," Bigwigs. Toronto, 1935, pp. 90-93.

Sandwell, Bernard Keble, "How the 'Sketches' Started," Saturday Night, LXVII (August 23, 1952), 7.

Sandwell, Bernard Keble, "Stephen Leacock," Warner Library, XV, 8928q-8928s.

Sandwell, Bernard Keble, "Stephen Leacock," Proceedings and Transactions of the Royal Society of Canada, XXXVIII (1944), 105-106.

Sandwell, Bernard Keble, "Stephen Leacock, Worst Dressed Writer, Made Fun Respectable," Saturday Night, LIX (April 8, 1944), 17.

Sandwell, Bernard Keble, "A Tribute to Stephen Leacock," Broadcast over the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation National Network. Sunday, April 2, 1944. Typescript in the Collection of The Orillia Public Library, Orillia Ontario.

Sedgewick, G. G., "Stephen Leacock as a Man of Letters," University of Toronto Quarterly, XV (October, 1945), 17-26.

---------- "Senility Gang Execution," The Montreal Star, LXVIII (March 25, 1936), 35.

Smith, Sydney, Elementary Sketches of Moral Philosophy. New York, 1856.

Stevenson, John, "Laughter Holding Both His Sides," A People's Best. Toronto, 1927, pp. 95-100.

Struble, Mildred, "Stephen Leacock, Jester," unpublished M.A. Thesis. University of Washington, 1920.

Twain, Mark, pseudonym of Samuel L. Clemens, How To Tell a Story and Other Essays. New York, n.d.

Twain, Mark, The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn. New York, 1950.

Wansbrough, Victor C., "Stephen Leacock," McGill News, XXXVII (Winter, 1955), 13-14, 51-55.

Wells, Carolyn, compiler, The Book of Humorous Verse. New York, 1920.

White, Elwyn Brooks and Katharine S. White, editors, A Subtreasury of American Humor. New York, 1941.

Willmann, John M., "An Analysis of Humor and Laughter," American Journal of Psychology, LIII (1940), 70-85.

Worchester, David, The Art of Satire. Cambridge, 1940.

Young, Archibald Hope, The Roll of Pupils of Upper Canada College, Toronto, January 1830 to June, 1916. Kingston, 1917.