

**BON-MOTS OF
SAMUEL FOOTE AND
THEODORE HOOK**

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Bon-mots of Samuel Foote and Theodore Hook by Various

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VARIOUS

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BON-MOTS.



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SAMUEL JOHNSON.

"The arrival of a merry-andrew in a town is more beneficial to the health of the inhabitants than twenty asses loaded with medicine."

"Now, as I never invent a jest myself, so I make it a rule never to laugh at other people's."—SWIFT'S Dull Man.

"Let the wits and humorists be consoled; they have the best of it—and the dull ones know it."—R. H. HORNE.

"He that will lose his friend for a jest deserves to die a beggar by the bargain."—FULLER.

"Act freely, carelessly, capriciously; as if our veins ran with quicksilver; and not utter a phrase but what shall come forth steeped in the very brine of conceit, and sparkle like salt in fire."—BEN JONSON.



INTRODUCTION.

SAMUEL FOOTE.

SOME writer of the time, with a turn for nick-names, dubbed Samuel Foote "the English Aristophanes," and every writer "echoes the conceit." As an author of satirical farce and broad comedy, as a mimetic actor, and as a ready wit, he stood alone during the third quarter of the eighteenth century. Petted and admired for his fortunes—he ran through *three*—and for the life and spirit with which he made himself one of the gay world, he was feared, and more or less cordially detested, as a man of ready and unmeasured wit, and of powers of mimicry which have never been equalled. His qualities as a social wit, as a teller of good stories, an utterer of *bon-mots* when "i' the vein" and among congenial company, are borne witness to by many of his friends and acquaintances. Even Doctor Johnson, "the Caliban of literature,"

could not resist him. "The first time I was in company with Foote was at Fitzherbert's. Having no good opinion of the fellow, I was resolved not to be pleased; and it is very difficult to please a man against his will. I went on eating my dinner pretty sullenly, affecting not to mind him. But the dog was so very comical that I was obliged to lay down my knife and fork, throw myself back upon my chair, and fairly laugh it out. No, Sir, he was irresistible. He upon one occasion experienced, in an extraordinary degree, the efficacy of his powers of entertaining. Amongst the many and various modes which he tried of getting money, he became a partner with a small-beer brewer, and he was to have a share of the profits for procuring customers amongst his numerous acquaintance. Fitzherbert was one who took his small-beer; but it was so bad that the servants resolved not to drink it. They were at some loss how to notify their resolution, being afraid of offending their master, who they knew liked Foote much as a companion. At last they fixed upon a little black boy, who was rather a favourite, to be their deputy, and deliver their remonstrance; and, having invested him with the whole authority of the kitchen, he was to inform Mr Fitzherbert, in all their names, upon a certain day, that they would drink Foote's small-beer no longer. On that day Foote happened to dine at Fitz-

herbert's, and this boy served at table; he was so delighted with Foote's stories and merriment and grimace, that when he went downstairs, he told them, 'This is the finest man I have ever seen. I will not deliver your message. I will drink his small-beer!'" And thus it was that the "small-beer" of Foote's somewhat coarse nature was put up with for the sake of his wit and his "loud, obstreperous, broad-faced mirth." David Garrick, Samuel Johnson, and many lesser luminaries, might fear their being "taken off" on the Haymarket stage, and threaten the mimic with chastisement legal and physical, yet they all unite in praise of his humour and wit. His humour was decidedly Aristophanic; that is to say, broad, easy, reckless, satirical, without the slightest alloy of *bonhomie*, and full of the directest personalities.—A meteor that delighted by the splendour of its blaze.—The meteor of the moment who possessed every species of wit.—He was of that sort that he would rather lose his friend than his jest.—He never stopped the career of his *bon-mot* out of respect to persons; it as readily struck a royal duke as a poor player.—His conversation was of such a description that "nought but itself could be its parallel!" Teeming with fancy, and various knowledge, fearless of consequences, and privileged in the character of a wit, he took his stand with confidence